# In Islamic Talismans, Repeat-Letter Ciphers Representing the "Greatest Name" Relate to an Early Prototype of the Seven Seals and may Link the Seals with the Pleiades

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In Islamic magic, the Greatest Name of God is traditionally represented in graphic form by a series of seven glyphs known as the Seven Seals; the series is also known to Jewish Kabbalah. Ciphers of a very different appearance, characterised by strings of single-letter (*ha'* and *'ayn*) repeats, are another recurring feature of Islamic amulets, as for example in the popular "Pleiades Square." These ciphers are often found close to occurrences of the Seven Seals and, while much less well known, they too are alleged to represent the Greatest Name. In the present communication, an unexpected avian association for the repeat-letter ciphers is explained in terms of the mythology of the Pleiades star cluster. Moreover, the ciphers are shown for the first time to relate directly to the Seven Seals via a *ca.* twelfth-century CE prototype of the latter preserved in a manuscript copy of the *Diwan of Ali* (Brit. Mus. 577 Add. 7534). While this prototype was soon supplanted by the now canonical version of the Seven Seals, degraded forms of the *Diwan* series seem to have survived incognito as the repeat-letter ciphers, which persist in Shi'a talismanic plaques sold today. Two other unexpected survivals/revivals of the *Diwan* Seal series in talismans of recent manufacture are also presented: one inscribed on an Ethiopian silver ring, the other concluding a Jewish Kabbalah scroll. The newly proposed Seal–cipher–Pleiades relationship links two auspicious heptads by associating the Seven Seals with the Seven Stars, a conjunction reminiscent of the seven stars/seals nexus in Revelation 1-6.

## The Seven Seals

The Seven Seals, sometimes called the Seals of Solomon[1] or Greatest Name of God (*al-Ism al-Aʿẓam*),[2,3] are a series of arcane symbols that feature prominently in Islamic mysticism, magic texts and talismans.[4,5,6] The now canonical form of the seven glyphs (Fig. 1a) was popularized in the Islamic world by the Egyptian magician Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf al-Būnī (d. 1225 CE), who included the symbols and their purported meanings and uses in various books, including his encyclopedic grimoire, the *Shams al-Maʿārif* (Sun of Gnosis).[7,8] However, al-Būnī was relying on older sources for much of his information, as detailed below. The Seals were espoused by the esoteric streams of both Sunni[9] and Shīʿa Islam.[10] However, the belief that the Seven Seals were discovered by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661 CE), cousin and son-in-law of Muḥammad, mean that the symbols have always held particular significance for Shīʿa mystics,[11] and more recently for their successors in the Bābī, Shaykhī, Bahāʾī and related movements.[12,13,14]

The Seals continue to enchant even today, and their niche in Western awareness is growing. The symbols feature in the paintings of contemporary artist Iman Abdullah Mahmud, including a work acquired by the British Museum,[15] while their power is extolled by contemporary practitioners of Islamic magic writing in English.[16] In regard to Western appreciation of the Seals, however, we should beware of an erroneous ordering of the symbols (Fig. 1f) which appears to have originated with a faulty table of correspondences in a lithograph edition of *Shumūs al-ʾAnwār* (The Solar Luminaries),[17] a compendium of magic compiled by Ibn al-Ḥājj al-Tilimsānī (d. 1336 CE).[18] Unfortunately, the table with the incorrect sequence was selected in 1908 by Edmond Doutté for

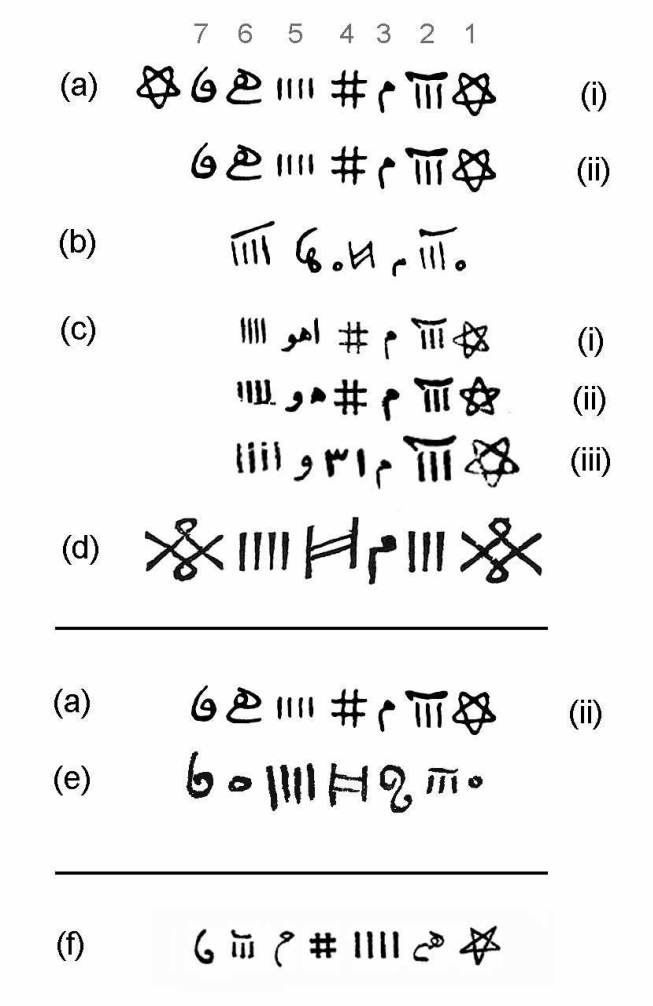


**Fig. 1. The Seven Seals in manuscripts and books.** Series (a)-(d) and (f) are Islamic, (e) is Jewish. Like Arabic/Hebrew text, the symbol series are read from right to left; the canonical Seals are numbered at the top of the figure. **(a)** Canonical Seal series from al-Būnī's *Shams al-Maʿārif* and *Manbaʿ Uṣūl al-Ḥikma*, **(i)** with and **(ii)** without a repeat of the first symbol in eighth position. Sometimes hexagrams are used instead of pentagrams. **(b)** Prototype Seal sequence in the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* (Brit. Mus. 577 Add. 7534). **(c)** Three Seal series related to the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* prototype in *Kitāb al-Muḥaqqiq al-Mudaqqiq*, a work by pseudo-ʾAbū Maʿshar. **(d)** An alternative Seal series preserved alongside the canonical series in al-Būnī's *Shams* and derivative works, reproduced in Doutté (1908) *Magie et Religion dans l'Afrique du Nord* and in Winkler (1930) *Siegel und Charaktere in der Mohammedanischen Zauberei*. **(e)** A representative composite of the Seal series found in Jewish Kabbalah works, as listed in note 68. **(f)** Incorrect sequence for the canonical Seal series reported in Doutté (1908) *Magie et Religion dans l'Afrique du Nord*, and still endemic to much Western literature.

reproduction in his influential *Magie et Religion dans l'Afrique du Nord*.[19] The error was passed on to the English-speaking world in 1930 by Sir E.A. Wallis Budge,[20] with the result that most modern "New Age" pendants featuring the Seven Seals have the symbols in the wrong order.

The first appearance of the Seven Seals is actually in a poetic description attributed to ʿAlī. Forms of ʿAlī's verse description are found in two works: the *Dīwān of ʿAlī,*[21] an anthology of poems often

published under the Arabic title *Anwār al-ʿUqūl min Ashʿar Waṣī al-Rasūl* (Lights and Minds from the Poetry of the Prophet's Executor), and the *Jaljalūtīah*, one of the great oral conjurations of Islamic magic. Editions of the *Dīwān* are ascribed to Saʿdī bin Tāji (compiled 1492 CE),[22] Quṭb al-Dīn ʾAbū al-Ḥussain Saʿīd al-Rāwandī (d. 1177 CE),[23] Quṭb al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Kaydarī al-Naysabūrī,[24] and al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 1044 CE).[25] On stylistic grounds the poetry is unlikely to date back to the time of ʿAlī,[26,27] and the last-mentioned editor may well be the true author of its contents.[28] Public disclosure of the *Jaljalūtīah* is attributed to Imām al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE),[29] who allegedly obtained it via a chain of transmission from the Prophet;[30] this chain includes ʿAlī, to whom the whole rite is often ascribed.[31,32] The *Jaljalūtīah* contains many power-names of Hebrew and Syriac origin[33] and is intimately associated with tables containing the Seven Seals,[34] to the extent that the latter are sometimes called the "*Jaljalūtīah* Seals."[35] Versions of ʿAlī's poem about the Seals, both in isolation[36] and in the context of the *Jaljalūtīah*,[37] are reproduced in the various recensions of al-Būnī's *Shams al-Maʿārif*,[38] while the *Jaljalūtīah* as a whole is explored in detail in that author's *Manbaʿ Uṣūl al-Ḥikma* (Source of the Essentials of Wisdom).[39] Many centuries later, ʿAlī's poem about the Seals was included in Muḥammad al-Ṭihrānī's (d. 1970 CE) standard reference text on Shīʿa Islam.[40]

**An early prototype in the *Dīwān of ʿAlī***

An extant copy of the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* (Brit. Mus. 577 Add. 7534) preserves a version of the poem that differs somewhat from the ones presented by al-Būnī.[41] A translation of the Arabic reads as follows:[42]

> Imam ʾAbū ʿAlī al-Ṭabarsī tells that the Sufi master ʾAbū al-Badr wrote down for him these signs, and he affirmed that he had heard from a trustworthy source that ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib had found them inscribed on a rock and declared that they were the highest Name of Allāh. And in these verses ʿAlī has commented on them:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Three rods are positioned next to a seal, | 1 |
> | Over their head appears something like a lance. | 2 |
> | And a *mīm*, blind and maimed, then a ladder | 3 |
> | To all that is hoped for, but it is not a ladder. | 4 |
> | And a good seal, then next to it a curved *hāʾ*, | 5 |
> | Look, it seems like the tube of a cupping head. | 6 |
> | And four positioned like fingers, | 7 |
> | That point to good works, but without the rest of the hand. | 8 |
> | O bearer of the true Name, know it to be sufficient, | 9 |
> | That you may be saved and delivered. | 10 |

The poem is accompanied by a matching depiction of the Seven Seals (Fig. 1b) that differs significantly from the standard series and is widely considered to predate it.[43,44,45] The first symbol (at far right in the figure, since Arabic reads from right to left) is the "seal" mentioned in line 1 of the poem, namely the Arabic letter *hāʾ* in its isolated form (ﻫ).[46,47] The second symbol (line 1) is the "three rods" ( ||| ), with an over-bar which is likened to a lance (line 2). The third symbol is a mutilated version of the Arabic letter *mīm* (ﻡ); the fourth is likened to a ladder (# or ♮, lines 3-4). The fifth (ﻫ) is a "good seal" (line 5), identical in appearance to the first symbol, and – as the second *hāʾ* in the series – formally equivalent to the canonical sixth Seal (Fig. 1a).[48] The sixth symbol in the *Dīwān* series is a modified version of the initial or medial form of the Arabic letter *hāʾ* (the "split-*hāʾ*" forms ﻫ and ﻫ, respectively) (line 5) which is likened to a phlebotomist's blood-

letting apparatus, apparently because its unnaturally curved and elongated tail resembles the tube used to siphon blood into the collection cup (line 6). Normally this comparison is applied to the canonical seventh Seal – the inverted *wāw* (و) of Fig. 1a , whose tail curls overhead – and it seems that the "curved *hāʾ*" of the *Dīwān* series combines the appearance of both the sixth and seventh canonical Seals. The four vertical strokes ( |||| ) of the seventh and final symbol in the *Dīwān* series are considered to resemble the fingers of a hand, but without a palm or wrist (line 7-8); this symbol is cognate with the fifth canonical Seal (Fig. 1a), and differs from it only in the addition of a horizontal over-bar. The poem concludes with an envoi extolling the power of this graphic form of the Greatest Name.

Heinrich Ewald, the first person to publish the *Dīwān*'s text in the Western literature, took the statement of a rock engraving in the preface to the poem at face value and regarded the Seals as a Himyarite inscription,[49] a view that can no longer be countenanced.[50] Hans Winkler, author of the main survey of this field, points out that the naming of Imām ʾAbū ʿAlī al-Tabarsī in this copy of the *Dīwān* places the text in the first half of the 12th century CE,[51] to accommodate the lifetime of this Imam.[52] When Winkler attempted to organise the various forms of the Seven Seals from older to newer by date and style, he ranked the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* series second in a list of 23 examples, between a 10-11th and a 13th century CE specimen, with series from the earliest extant copy of al-Būnī's *Shams al-Maʿārif* (Cod. Par. 2674 f.56b & 57b, 13th century CE) placed fifth and sixth.[53]

Winkler mentions four other instances where the Seals resemble the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* series: one is in another copy of the *Dīwān* (tentatively assigned to the adjacent Brit. Mus. 578), and three more (which Winkler does not show) are preserved in a print edition of *Kitāb al-Muḥaqqiq al-Mudaqqiq*,[54] a work by pseudo-ʾAbū Maʿshar[55] (Fig. 1c). However, the popularity and influence of al-Būnī's corpus was such that the form of the Seals in the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* became marginalized and almost immediately disappeared from mainstream use. At best, an abbreviated memory of it (Fig. 1d) (in which the first Seal, here shown as a double-*hāʾ* [2 x ﻫ] emblem or proto-hexagram,[56] is repeated at the end, as for Fig. 1a(i)) may have been preserved in parallel with the standard series in the *Shams* and subsequent derivative works.[57] While this alternative series is presented as a late variant (20th position) in Winkler's "time sequence," it lacks the split-*hāʾ* (ﻫ or ﻩ) and *wāw* (و) entirely, and is therefore equally likely to have arisen from the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* prototype as from the canonical series.[58]

**A *Dīwān*-like Seal series on a recent Islamic talisman**

Although the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* prototype and its derivatives have largely vanished from the talismanic repertoire, occasionally an item comes to light which appears to have preserved or revived a memory of this family. One example is a vintage Ethiopian silver ring in the author's collection, into which is incised (lightly, and somewhat crudely) a Seal series of this type (Fig. 2a). While a pentagram has replaced the initial circular *hāʾ* (ه), a substitution promoted by al-Būnī,[59] the order of the symbols is distinctive of the prototype in the *Dīwān*. Notably, the central circular *hāʾ* (ه) appears to have been retained; it is followed immediately by the split-*hāʾ* (ﻫ, inscribed on its side due to spatial limitations) and then the four strokes, a symbol sequence quite different to the canonical one of Fig. 1a. The repeat of the initial pentagram at the end of the series is a common embellishment of Seal series in general (Fig. 1a(i)).

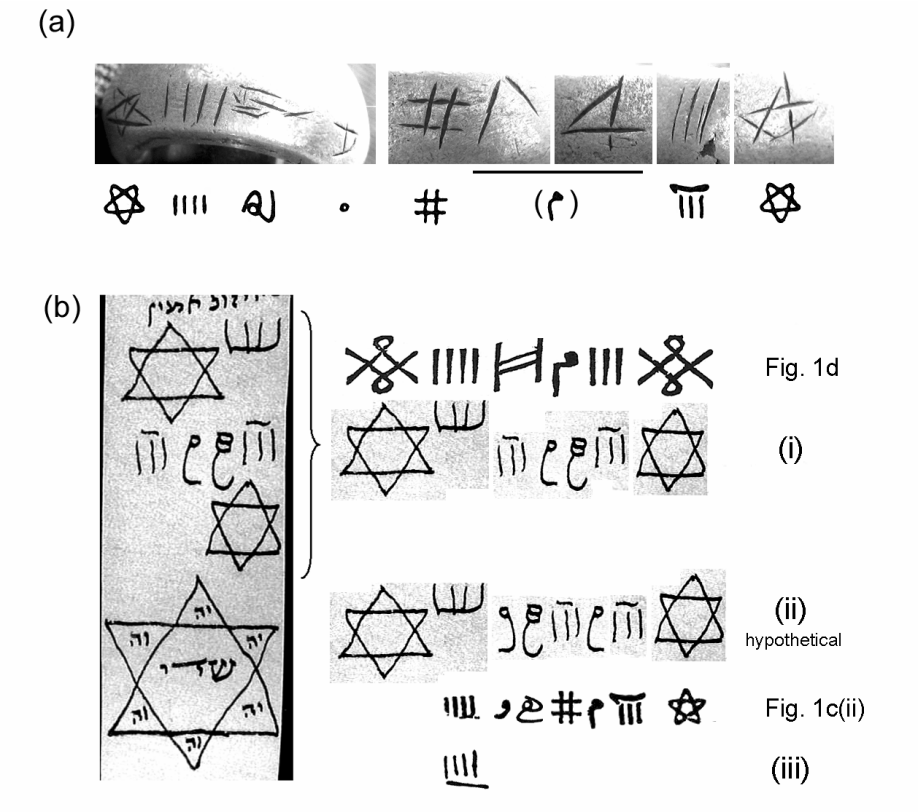


**Fig. 2. *Dīwān*-like Seal series on recent talismans.** Items are actual talismans (rings and scrolls) as distinct from instructional texts. **(a)** Ethiopian Islamic silver ring featuring a Seal series with characteristics of the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* prototype. The upper symbol sequence from the ring is at right, with gaps removed, while the lower sequence from the ring is at left. Below the photographs appear cognate symbols from Fig. 1a,b; the split-*hāʾ* has been rotated 90º anti-clockwise to match its orientation on the ring. **(b)** End of a Jewish Kabbalah vellum scroll, 1950s CE, Safed, Israel. The Seal series is here identified by a large curly bracket. A final large Star of David containing שדי (*Shaddai*, Almighty) and letters from three repeats of the Tetragrammaton is also present, but will not be discussed further. At right, the Seal series has **(i)** been liberated from the narrow confines of the scroll (2.8 cm wide) and linearized for comparison with Fig. 1d (shown above it), and then **(ii)** been expanded into its most likely original template for comparison with Fig. 1c(ii) (shown below it). The indistinct split-*hāʾ* in the latter has been replaced by a clearer one from Fig. 1a. In **(iii)** is shown, after inversion, the "four strokes" symbol from Fig. 1b.

It is highly unusual to find such a close match for the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* sequence in any location outside Brit. Mus. 577/8, much less on a physical talisman which is unlikely to be even a century old. Its country of origin, Ethiopia, is also a surprise. While the *Shams al-Maʿārif* has been translated into Ge'ez,[60] the Ethiopic language that survives in the liturgy of the indigenous Christian churches, it is unusual for an Ethiopian ring to carry an intact Seal series. Only one other example (a silver ring bearing a deeply-engraved canonical sequence; not shown) has come to my attention. In contrast, white-metal Ethiopian rings bearing stamped talismanic symbols – some of which strongly resemble individual Seal characters – are relatively common; the glyphs (not shown) appear to be composites formed using simple straight-line and semi-circular punch tools. Western merchants usually attribute such rings to tribes of the Jimma region in the southern highlands or to the Oromo people of Wollo province,[61] both regions with mixed

Christian/Muslim populations.[62] In the absence of more definite information, the ring of Fig. 2a may tentatively be ascribed a similar provenance.

**A *Dīwān*-like Seal series on a recent Kabbalah talisman**

While most prominent in the context of Islam and its offshoots, the Seven Seals are also known to Judaism,[63] with Kabbalistic use of these symbols dating back to at least the 13th century CE.[64] In contrast to Islam, in Judaism each of the Seven Seals has a name. The first Seal is called *Yaṭat* (יטת),[65] the second is *Ṭat* (טת), the third *Saṭiṭ* (סטיט), the fourth *Saṭiṭyah* (סטיטיה), and so on;[66] we will return to these names towards the end of the paper. In Jewish sources, the usual sequence of symbols (Fig. 1e) is the same as in the canonical Islamic series of Fig. 1a(ii), although in early printed books the characters tend to take on a heavy "woodblock" appearance.[67] Primary Jewish sources do not use either a pentagram or hexagram as the first Seal, but instead employ a simple circular or square shape.[68] Indeed, one feature common to the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* prototype and many handwritten Jewish Seal series is the use of small circles to depict (the equivalents of) both the first and sixth canonical Seals (Fig. 1b,e). Winkler, who examined only Islamic sources, considers the former trait to be a hallmark of very early series. On the authority of al-Būnī and others, he believes the original forms of both the first and sixth canonical Seals to be the Arabic letter *hāʾ*, with respective origins in the isolated (ه) and initial/medial (هـ, ﻫ) forms of this letter.[69]

Jewish versions of the Seven seals occasionally feature in Kabbalah protective scrolls from modern times. As mentioned above, Jewish sources traditionally do not employ a pentagram/ hexagram as the first Seal, nor for that matter an additional eighth Seal in the manner of Fig. 1a(i). However, an exception has come to light: a "general protection" Kabbalah amulet composed in Safed, Israel, during the 1950s CE, concludes with a form of the Seven Seals (Fig. 2b, left, identified by a large curly bracket) which involves two hexagrams and resembles Islamic versions far more than known Jewish ones. Hexagrams supplant pentagrams in many Islamic Seal series,[70] but the use of six-cornered "Stars of David" is particularly easy to understand in a Kabbalah artifact made in modern Israel soon after the state's foundation. While the symbol series has been split over three lines to fit on the narrow strip of vellum, its probable linear sequence is shown in Fig. 2b(i). At face value, this series shows most similarity with Fig. 1d, beyond which it can be assigned to the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* family because the split-*hāʾ* and the potential *wāw*-equivalent lie to the right of the "four strokes" symbol (cognate with the canonical fifth Seal of Fig. 1a). We may reasonably surmise that the three Seals consisting of similarly-shaped Arabic letters (*mīm*, split-*hāʾ* and *wāw*; i.e, from right to left, م هـ و) became clustered and then conflated at the rightful position of the *mīm*,[71] ending up as a single group of two such letters immediately left of the "three strokes" symbol (i.e., directly after the second Seal). The original template most amenable to such condensation is shown in Fig. 2b(ii); this too belongs to the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* family (cf. Fig. 1c). Indeed, the underscoring of the four strokes in the Kabbalah scroll may recapitulate the seldom-seen horizontal bar that forms part of this glyph in the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* series (Fig. 2b(iii)).[72]

Although the Seal series in the Kabbalah scroll has undergone considerable modification, there are several indications that it most closely relates to the prototype in the *Dīwān of ʿAlī*. While it is conceivable that the *Dīwān* series could be preserved independently in Jewish tradition, emerging to view only rarely, it seems more likely that the Seals on this amulet have been remembered

from an Islamic source seen by its 20th-century CE author. The syncretic nature of magic is well known;[73] in the medieval era, Jewish and Islamic magic co-existed in a "creative symbiosis,"[74] and perhaps the boundaries between the two have remained porous up to the present day.

**The single-letter repeat ciphers**

Distinctive ciphers, characterized by strings of Arabic single-letter repeats (Fig. 3), also recur in Islamic amulets, often featuring close to occurrences of the Seven Seals. The initial repeat segment consists of five consecutive letters *hāʾ* (usually ه or ھ forms), while the second repeat consists of seven consecutive glyphs, each of which looks like a large *hamza* (ء) or the initial-position form of *ʿayn* (ع). The latter is actually the preferred form of this letter in talismans,[75] and the sevenfold-repeated glyph has been identified by others as the letter *ʿayn*.[76] This identification

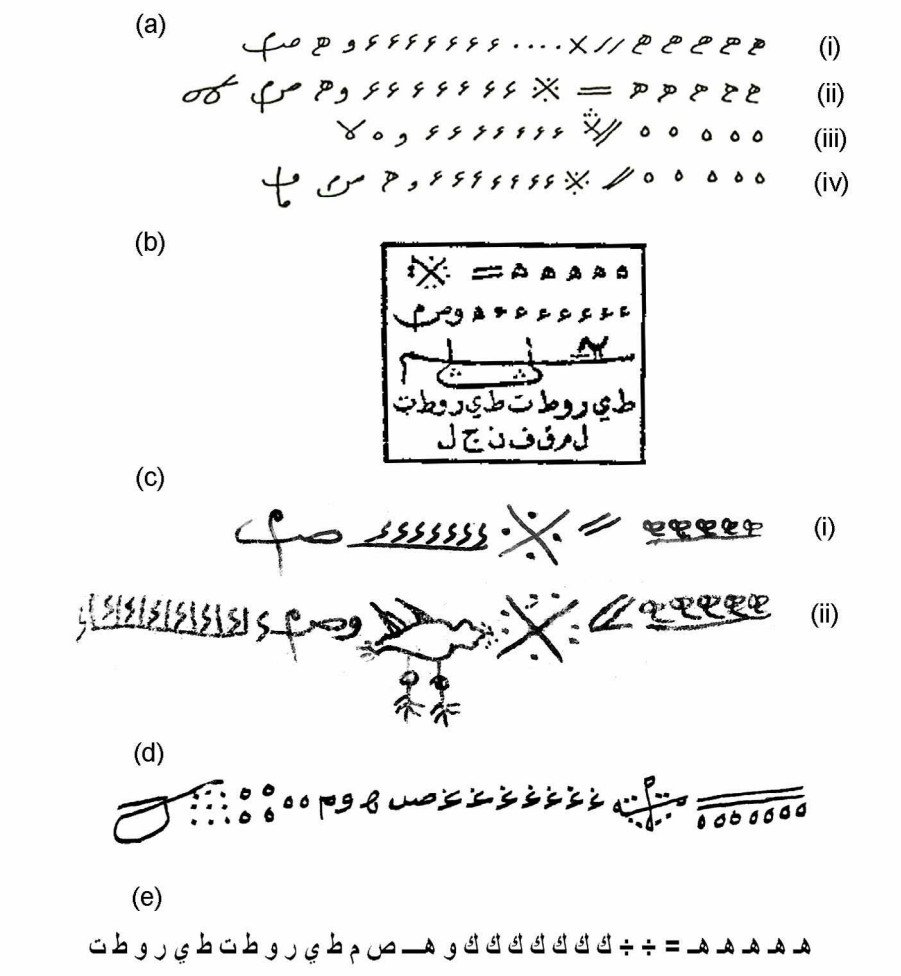


**Fig. 3. The repeat-letter ciphers in manuscripts and books. (a)** Ciphers as reported by MacEoin (1994) in the order given in *Rituals in Babism and Bahaʾism*, reproduced by kind permission of the author. **(b)** Pleiades Square talisman from al-Būnī's *Manbaʿ Uṣūl al-Ḥikma*. **(c)** Two versions from a page in an unidentified Ottoman talisman book (author's manuscript collection). **(d)** Version from an undated copy of a work by al-Basṭāmī (author's manuscript collection). **(e)** Typed version on the Arabic website "Hakim Ruhani Forum" (note 91).

receives strong support from *abjad* (i.e., numerological) considerations. The number of repetitions required for Divine Names was often taken from the *abjad* value of the Name, and similarly the number of repeats specified for an isolated letter was often simply its value in *abjad* reckoning.[77] Thus the *abjad* value of *hāʾ* is 5, and at the start of the cipher *hāʾ* is repeated five times. The *abjad* value for *ʿayn* is usually 70,[78] but in talismans may simply be 7,[79] with both numbers clearly relating to the seven repetitions usual for the character in the ciphers. Since the *abjad* value of *hamza* is 1, it seems fairly certain that the repeated glyph is indeed an *ʿayn*.

A collection of repeat-letter ciphers gathered in modern times from Shīʿa, Bābī, Shaykhī, and Bahāʾī documents by Prof. Denis MacEoin is presented in Fig. 3a. The cross (X) in most versions of the cipher is surrounded by four dots, usually with one in each quadrant (※). The cross-with-four-dots is found also in the Berber magic symbol repertoire[80] and in the Greek magical papyri;[81] this composite actually dates back to prehistoric times,[82] and will be discussed further below (see *Use of the ciphers: the dotted cross*). The cipher series conclude with letters *wāw* (و), *hāʾ* (ه or ھ), and one or two symbols resembling crossed swords or a pair of scissors. Another example of the cipher is found in the Pleiades Square (Fig. 3b), a healing talisman given by al-Būnī[83] and reproduced recently in a manual for English-speaking devotees of Arabic magic.[84] Here the cross in the cipher contains seven dots, representing the seven stars of the Pleiades,[85] while the first of the "crossed sword" motifs is explained as an intersection of the letters *ṣād* (ص) and *mīm* (م).[86] The cipher is followed by a drawing of a bird eating seed,[87] the "esoteric word"[88] *ṬĪRŪṬAT* (ط ي ر و ط ت) in tandem repeat, and the acronym *LMQFNJL* (ل م ق ف ن ج ل).[89] The latter refers to the *Ṭahaṭīl* names, seven power-names that can be used to summon spiritual agencies; these are described in al-Būnī's *Manbaʿ*.[90]

In an Ottoman Arabic grimoire, the cipher appears both without and with the seed-eating bird (Fig. 3c). In the latter case, the bird has become integrated into the series after the seven-dotted cross, and the *ʿayn* (ع) repeat segment now comes at the end (far left). Another version appears in a manuscript copy of a work by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Basṭāmī (d. 1454 CE) (Fig. 3d), in which the bird seems to have been reduced to a minimal "lasso shape" at the end of the cipher (far left), while its seed has been organized into a neat array. Finally, Fig. 3e shows a modern version where the cipher has been rendered into standard typography for a website post on the "Hakim Ruhani Forum."[91] Here the repeats of *ʿayn* (ع) have changed into repeats of the letter *kāf*, no doubt because the former, when shown with each letter in a cell as in Fig. 3c(ii) (i.e., ع), look very much like the latter (i.e., ك). They are followed by two repeats of the word *ṬĪRŪṬAT*, as seen above in Fig. 3b. In Fig. 3d,e the *ʿayn* repeat segment (or its equivalent) is followed by a combination of the four letters *wāw*, *hāʾ*, *ṣād* and *mīm* (i.e., م , ص , ھ , و), with the adjacent nature of the last two (Fig. 3e) supporting the identification of the first crossed-sword motif as a *ṣād* intersecting with a *mīm* (Fig. 3b). MacEoin suggests that the variation in the forms taken by the cipher are largely ascribable to a reliance on verbal descriptions.[92]

**The ciphers on recent Islamic talismans**

Complex talismanic designs engraved on brass plaques are still sold today in Iran (Fig. 4a), ostensibly to grant the owner power over the *jinn* (in Anglicized form, "genies") so that they will fulfill his or her desires. These Shīʿa talismans are undoubtedly based on old – probably medieval – models, and often contain figurative drawings of humans or animals that contravene the Islamic

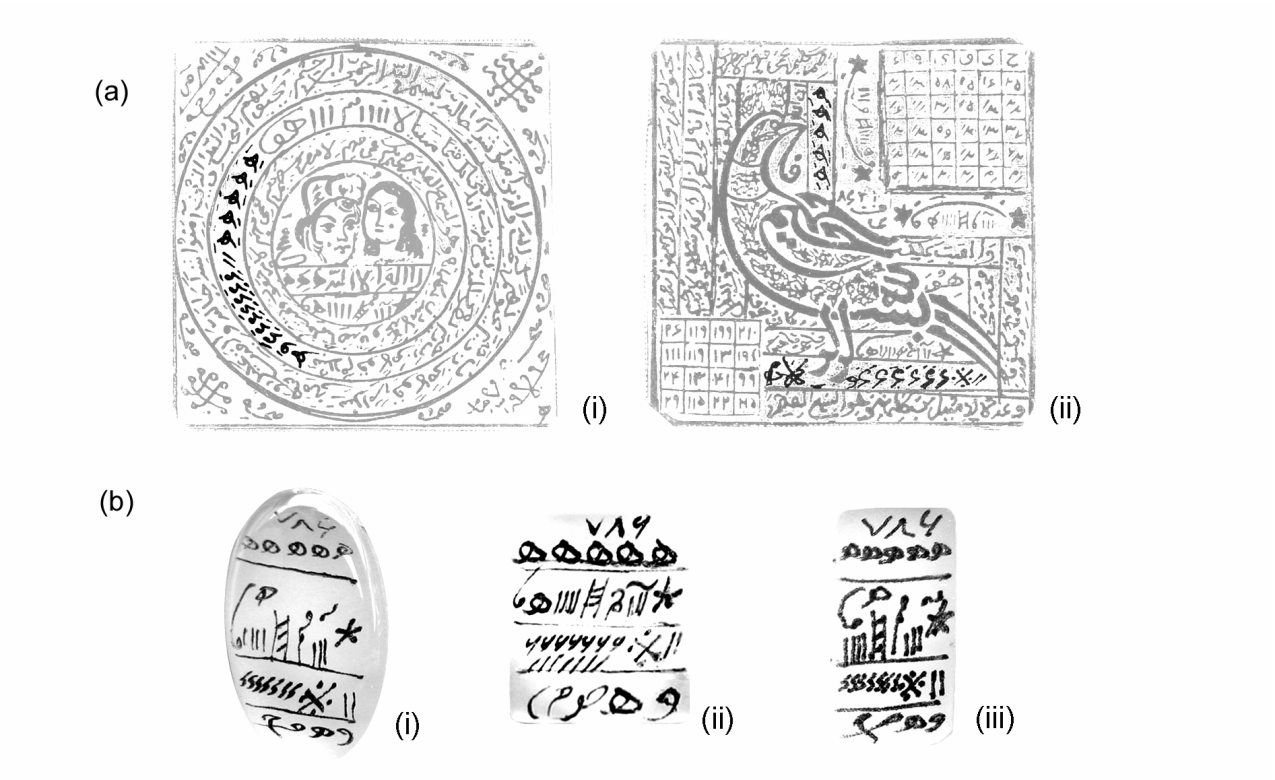


**Fig. 4. The repeat-letter ciphers on recent Islamic talismans.** Items are actual talismans (plaques and gemstones) as distinct from instructional texts. **(a)** Iranian hand-crafted brass plaques that feature the repeat-letter ciphers; purchased new. Elements other than the ciphers have been de-emphasized by decreasing the contrast. **(b)** Gem faces from Iranian silver rings bearing *sharaf al-shams* stones, yellow onyx inscribed by hand with both Seals and ciphers; purchased new. Horizontal lines divide each stone into four fields. In each case, the top field contains an Arabic number followed by the five split-*hāʾ* elements of the cipher, the second contains the canonical Seven Seals, while the third and fourth contain the remainder of the cipher.

taboo that usually surrounds such portraiture. In some cases (e.g., Fig. 4a(ii)) the taboo has been side-stepped by using a calligram – that is, a picture built up of letters and words that have been arranged (and , where necessary, distorted) so as to form an image. These plaques often contain the canonical Seven Seal series, or obvious derivatives thereof. For example, in Fig. 4a(ii) a Seal series flanks the two internal sides of the upper right-hand magic square, while another nestles between the bird's legs and tail. In Fig. 4a(i) a canonical series occupies the second horizontal row below the couple's faces, while a somewhat degraded version occupies the one-o'clock to ten-o'clock segment (anti-clockwise) in the middle ring of circular text. Immediately adjacent to these occurrences of the Seven Seals we find instances of the ciphers. In Fig. 4a(i), the cipher follows immediately after the degraded Seal series in the middle circle of text (ten-o'clock to seven-o'clock anti-clockwise segment); it is atypical in lacking the dotted cross symbol. In Fig. 4a(ii) the cipher has been split into two parts, the first (five *hāʾ*, i.e. ﻫ) placed vertically next to the bird's beak, the second placed horizontally so as to flank its claws. The latter is anomalous in having only six copies of the *ʿayn* (ﻉ); it is also unclear whether its penultimate emblem is a split-*hāʾ* (ﻫ or ﻬ) or a crossed-sword motif, or perhaps a fusion of both.

Yellow onyx engraved with the Seven Seals is called *sharaf al-shams* ("Dignity of the Sun") in Arabic and Farsi; it is a gemstone that reputedly brings good luck in matters of health, wealth, family and knowledge.[93] The premium form of this agate stone comes from Yemen. *Sharaf al-shams* is believed to protect the wearer from any kind of adverse magic, to cure insomnia or nightmares, and to temper negative moods such as sadness and anger with the positive emotion of joy. It is also claimed to improve the wearer's eyesight. These illuminating properties are explained in terms of the stone absorbing the rays of the sun and passing their benefits on to the body.[94] The stone's religious virtue has long been acknowledged, with Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 765 CE) allegedly stating that a prayer made with agate is forty times better than one made without it. The *sharaf al-shams* stones in Fig. 4b have been engraved with both Seal and cipher symbols. The yellow onyx/Seven Seals association appears to be of long standing, but the term *sharaf al-shams* can refer to the Seals even without the stone.[95] The gems in Fig. 4b were engraved during one particular day and night of the year called *qamar al-ʿaqrab*, a point in the celestial pass when the moon is in Scorpio, as this imbues the talisman with special potency.[96] Horizontal lines divide each stone into four fields. In each case, the top field contains the Arabic number 786 (the *abjad* total for the letters of the *Basmalla*, "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful"),[97] followed by the five split-*ha* (ﻪ) elements of the cipher; the second field contains the canonical form of the Seven Seals; the third field continues the cipher as far as the seven *ʿayn* (ﻉ) symbols, while the fourth contains the remainder of the cipher. Once again, we see the ciphers appearing in intimate association with the canonical Seven Seal series.

**Use of the ciphers: the dotted cross**

In terms of practical use, the repeat-letter ciphers are almost always presented as talismans for curing pain and healing sickness. Those in Fig. 3a(iii) and 3a(iv) are discussed by Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn Ibrahīm ibn ʿAlī al-Kafʿamī (d. 1495 CE) and his 19th-century CE commentator, Karīm Khān Kirmānī; the former's instruction that one of the ciphers be written on the palm of the left hand as a cure for colic and perhaps flatulence prompted the latter to categorize it as "a medical charm of uncertain antiquity."[98] The Pleiades Square (Fig. 3b) can be washed off a glass or china surface to make a healing water that is administered to the patient either externally or internally,[99] while a similar formulation is advised for the version in modern typography (Fig. 3e).[100]

As mentioned above, the cross-with-four-dots symbol (※) has prehistoric roots, where it originally served as a fertility token.[101] It may have denoted planting "in all four directions," a practice still enshrined in European folk belief.[102] An enclosed cross-with-four-dots adorns the pubic area of a 5th-century BCE goddess statuette from the Ukraine, showing how closely this motif was identified with the generative power of the mother-goddess.[103] The presence of a four-dotted cross in many versions of the cipher potentially invokes this universal life force, as befits a remedy for healing the sick. But in addition to this sign we also find a cross with seven dots, which probably evolved from the original fertility symbol and (as mentioned above) signifies the seven stars of the Pleiades. These too are reputed of old to have beneficial and soothing effects, with the Old Testament *Book of Job* referring to "the sweet influences of Pleiades" (Job 38:31). A precise understanding of their benevolence has eluded scholars for centuries, but one mythographer has recently identified a "honey theme" in stories of the Pleiadic seven sisters from diverse cultures, going on to praise the life-giving, medicinal and healing properties of this natural product.[104] In the Qurʾān, honey is "a syrup of different hues, a cure for men" (Qurʾān 16:69).

Interpretations of the four- and seven-dotted crosses need not be mutually exclusive. In the ancient and medieval Middle East, the Pleiades – undoubtedly the most famous stars in Islamic folklore – were an important seasonal marker for nomadic and agricultural activities.[105] Their dawn setting in mid-autumn signalled a period of rain on the Arabian peninsula necessary for Bedouin herds to have adequate pasture,[106] while their evening rising in autumn was a marker for dates to ripen on the peninsula.[107] The latter event was also a prompt to sow or harvest, depending on the crop and region of the Islamic world; for the Sinai Bedouin, "planting time is Pleiades time."[108] The Pleiades disappear into daylight for about 40-50 days in early May, which in Egypt marks the "Forty Days of Summer."[109] This is a highly inauspicious time, which some commentators link to a night of evil mentioned in the Qūrʾān.[110] In Sinai, the locusts only come during the disappearance of the Pleiades, because they are afraid of them.[111] The absence of the star-cluster is associated with winds which make sailing dangerous,[112] while the hot winds at the time of its return (when it is still absent from the night sky, rising at dawn) damage crops, and bring pests and disease.[113] Overall, we can see that the theme of fertility, in the broad sense of agricultural prosperity, is well aligned with the "sweet influences of Pleiades," whose movements herald the hoped-for rains and the sugar of ripe dates, and whose absence from the night sky invites adversity or even calamity. From this it is almost inevitable that the Pleiades should become vested with magical and protective power, an association often encountered in Arabic manuscripts and folklore. For example, a person who becomes ill at the time when the Pleiades rise is considered to be protected against death.[114] ʾAbū Yaḥyaʾ Zakariyā al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283 CE) noted that God gave the *jinn* power over water at the dawn rising of the Pleiades, leading some doctors to forbid the drinking of water at night at that time of year because of the spirits it might harbor.[115] It is little wonder, then, that the Pleiades are invoked in a healing talisman such as this.

**Use of the ciphers: the Arabic letters**

Of the five different letters present in the ciphers (*hāʾ*, *ʿayn*, *ṣād*, *mīm* and *wāw*), all have positive attributes in Arabic magic.[116] *Hāʾ*, *ʿayn*, *ṣād* and *mīm* are all "Letters of Light," i.e., members of the group of fourteen mysterious *muqaṭṭaʿāt* letters whose subsets begin various sūras of the Qurʾān.[117] The first three cipher letters actually appear together with two other letters (*yāʾ* and *kāf*) in the *muqaṭṭaʿāt* series at the head of Sūra 19 (Mary), while *ṣād* and *mīm* co-appear at the end of the four-letter *muqaṭṭaʿāt* sequence (*ʾalif lām mīm ṣād*) that begins Sūra 7 (The Heights). Collectively, the Letters of Light are considered effective in aiding childbirth and relieving epileptic seizures.[118] Beyond this, specific letters (which need not be members of this group) are ascribed individual protective and healing powers by al-Būnī.[119] One attribute of *ʿayn* relates to a specific Name of God, *ʿĀlim al-Ghayb wa al-Shahāda* (He Who Knows the Invisible and the Visible),[120] which is reputed to relieve depression,[121] while in another aspect *ʿayn* relieves ophthalmic pain, as befits a letter whose origin lies in a pictogram of the eye.[122] A magic square composed of the letter *hāʾ* alleviates fear of the dark,[123] whereas the letter *wāw* prevents phlegm entering the mouth, cures headaches, and protects against the recurring fever ("quartan ague") of diseases such as malaria.[124] The properties of specific expansions of *hāʾ* and *wāw*, which are empowered by these letters' inclusion in the Seven Seals, will be discussed below (see *The ciphers' origins lie in the Seven Seals*).

The acronym *LMQFNJL* appears after the cipher in the Pleiades Square and serves to terminate the talisman. Like the letters already discussed, this acronym – and the *Ṭahaṭīl* names that it

stands for – possess many useful attributes, including protective and healing properties that are consistent with its inclusion in a curative charm. For example, the *Ṭahaṭī/* names can be used to alleviate migraines, headaches, the effects of the evil eye, and general ailments.[125] The acronym is often found in association with the Seven Seals,[126] and indeed the seven *Ṭahaṭī/* names that it stands for are mapped individually to the Seven Seals by al-Būnī.[127] Thus the occurrence of *LMQFNJL* at the very end of the Pleiades Square (Fig. 3b) provides a clue that the Seven Seals – recognizable or otherwise – are probably not far away.

Despite being able to rationalize the presence some elements within or following the ciphers in terms of the healing intention of the whole talisman, we are still left with the problem of explaining why the cipher series takes the overall form that it does. This issue is addressed in the next section.

**The ciphers' origins lie in the Seven Seals**

Although the 19th-century CE Shaykhī leader Karīm Khān Kirmānī thought it unlikely that the ciphers originated with one of the Imams,[128] they are nevertheless claimed to represent a "curious form" of the Greatest Name,[129] in effect an alternative to the canonical Seven Seals.[130] As we shall see, though, the ciphers are in fact degenerate forms of the prototype Seal series found in the the *Dīwān of ʿAlī*.

Fig. 5a illustrates the proposed transformation of the Seven Seals into the repeat-letter ciphers. The top two lines show two "reduced versions" of the canonical Seal series (i.e., versions containing less than seven different symbols) that we have already encountered. The first is al-Būnī's "alternative series," encountered earlier in Fig. 1d, while the second is the Seal series from the *Dīwān of ʿAlī*, and the real template for what follows. Below it in Fig. 5a appear the ciphers from Fig. 3a, except that each repeat segment has now been conflated to a single letter, and some gaps have been removed to preserve the vertical alignment (see legend to Fig. 5a for details). The earliest events in the (de-)evolution of the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* prototype (Fig. 1b, second line in Fig. 5a) involve decomposition of the four linear elements of the second Seal into a X// combination, a position swap of the neighbouring ladder (ﻟ) and *mīm* (ﻡ) (gray arrows in Fig. 5a), and omission of the four strokes ( |||| ), but with full conservation of the types and positions of the three *hāʾ* symbols (two ﻫ and one ﻩ)[131] (Fig. 5a(i)). Concomitant with these changes is the reduction of the ladder to a ﻉ-shape, simply the initial form of the letter *ʿayn* as discussed above, and a reflection of the *mīm* (ﻡ) so that it becomes a *wāw* (ﻭ) (Fig. 5a(i)). An intermediate or alternate deconstruction of the second Seal can be seen ahead at the far left of the upper row in Fig. 5b, where two of this Seal's upright strokes are preserved with wavy overhead lines (typical of the over-bar for this Seal, see lower line in figure panel) but co-mingled with small circles, i.e. *hāʾ* symbols (ﻫ) of the type comprising the first Seal. One of the small circles is underscored with two small horizontal lines, which are in fact the // or = of the degenerate second Seal in Fig. 5a(i)-(iv).

Returning to Fig. 5a, by series (ii) the small innermost *hāʾ* (ﻫ) has been lost, and new symbols have appeared (Fig. 5a(ii)-(iii)) which correspond to the final (i.e., left-most) two seals in the top line of the figure. The repetition of a first Seal *hāʾ* symbol to conclude a Seal series is

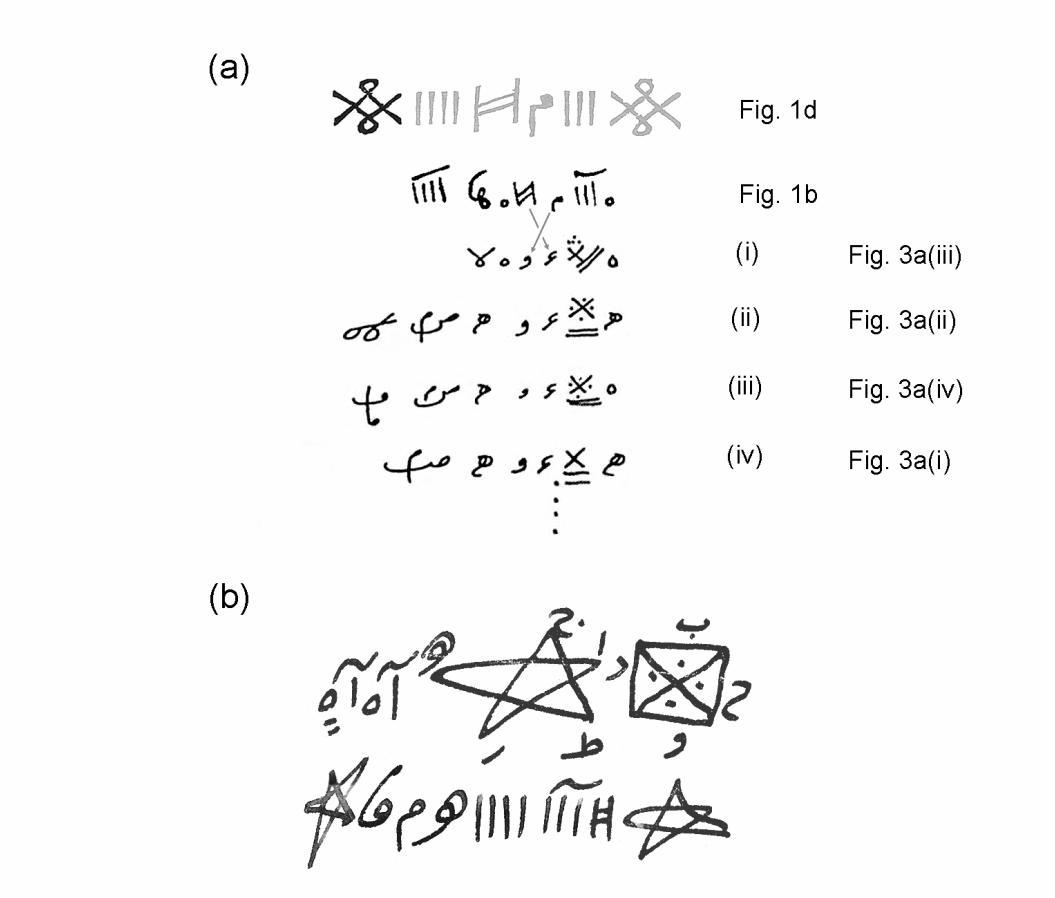


**Fig. 5. Proposed (de-)evolution of the *Dīwān* Seal series into the repeat-letter ciphers**. **(a)** The top two lines show an adjunct template, namely al-Būnī's alternative Seal series (Fig. 1d, with less relevant symbols de-emphasized) above the main template, namely the prototype Seal series from the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* (Fig. 1b). Beneath these templates are the ciphers from Fig. 3a, with their identification in that figure shown at right, but here organized into a putative "time sequence" and aligned with the templates above them. Gray arrows show the early position swap of two adjacent elements. For **(i)-(iv)**, the repeats of the first and third symbols (strings of 5 and 7 letters, respectively) have for clarity been conflated to a single letter in each case; for **(ii)-(iv)**, the X and // elements (both derived from the second Seal) have deliberately been co-located to preserve the alignment. For **(iv)**, four dots forming a horizontal row in the original have been repositioned vertically below their location in the series to preserve the alignment. **(b)** Detail of a manuscript page from the library of Saʿad Dalʿu, a Syrian astrologer and numerologer who lived *ca*. 1900 CE in Mt. Qassioun near Damascus. See text for details.

unremarkable, having been met with as early as Fig. 1a(i); in this instance the shape is a "double-*hāʾ*" emblem or proto-hexagram like that in Fig. 1d. But in this case both the "four strokes" Seal from the far left of the *Dīwān* series and the new "double-*hāʾ*" terminal Seal are already degraded to barely recognizable forms, akin to certain *charaktères* or "spectacle letters" of ancient magic.[132] A sense of the "four strokes" Seal's orthogonal components (horizontal over-bar *vs*. vertical strokes) is preserved in the intersecting *ṣād* (ص , horizontal) and *mīm* (م, vertical), the latter of which compensates for the *mīm* so recently lost from the *Dīwān* series by mutation. The looped projections of the terminal double-*hāʾ* emblem are preserved in the handles of the new "scissors

symbol," still drawn as open loops in Fig. 5a(ii), but reduced to filled terminal bulbs by Fig. 5a(iii).[133]

This new final symbol is sufficiently similar in shape to the adjacent *ṣād·mīm* composite that the two can become conflated (Fig. 5a(iv)). In this last example of the cipher, the four dots from the vertices of the ※ are redistributed to form a horizontal row immediately after the cross (····, depicted vertically in Fig. 5a(iv) to preserve the alignment). It is as if the four dots are being used to compensate for the earlier loss of the "four strokes" by mutation. At this point, it is worth remarking that a Tifinagh origin has been postulated for the canonical Seal symbols,[134] which would locate their antecedents in the Libyco-Berber symbol repertoire of the Tuareg and other Saharan nomads. It is interesting to note that an ancient form of Moroccan Libyco-Berber uses four vertical strokes ( ||||, with or without an over-bar) to represent one type of "t" sound (actually the "*ṭ*" that dominates the *Ṭahaṭīl* names and features twice in *ṬĪRŪṬAT* ), and that these four strokes become replaced by four horizontal dots (····) in the later transitional form of the script.[135]

For completeness, we should examine the rest of the manuscript excerpt shown in Fig. 5b. The upper line in this panel shows (from right) a boxed X with four dots (※), familiar from the repeat-letter ciphers, surrounded (clockwise from top) by ب د و ح, namely the magical word *BDUḤ* ("*Baduḥ*"),[136,137] whose letters correspond to the *abjad* series 2–4–6–8. After this comes a pentagram surrounded by the letters ا ط ا ه ج , a power-name (*JHAṬA*) found in other talismans.[138] In the lower line of Fig. 5b, the Seals based on Arabic letters – namely, *mīm*, split-*hāʾ* and *wāw* (و , ھ , م) – have become clustered within a permuted version of the canonical Seal series at the rightful position of the last two ( ھ و ), forming a group that resembles the *wāw*, split-*hāʾ* and *ṣād·mīm* found at the end of most versions of the ciphers. A similar clustering (in that case, localized at the rightful position of the *mīm*) was proposed above for a precursor of the Seal series in the Kabbalah scroll.

**Repeat-letter strings of individual Seals are not without precedent**

Let us conclude our discussion of the proposed transformation of the Seals into the ciphers by addressing an underpinning feature glossed over in Fig. 5a: the selective amplification of certain symbols. Why would particular letters have been singled out for repetition in the original ciphers (Fig. 3a)? al-Būnī describes the separate use of specific of subsets of characters from the canonical Seal series, and in particular mentions combinations and expansions of split-*hāʾ* and *wāw* that are efficacious in medical and other contexts. In one example, the effects are largely positive:[139]

> …the last [*hāʾ*-based] Seal is meant, namely the split-*hāʾ*. It is written and the *wāw* then repeated. If you want to handle business, then this is useful; likewise to destroy magic, to free one who is bound, to make difficult things easier, it is good for the confinement of pregnant women, to continue to bind the tongue of an adversary, to free a prisoner, […] to get an abundance of blessings in the diet, and to continue to dampen a man's anger.

However, a contrary arrangement of the Seal characters inflicts suffering:[140]

> […] But] if it is written in reverse order, with the *wāw* repeated before the *hāʾ* and then five split-*hāʾ*s stand, then it is good for causing worry, sorrowful contemplation, scruples, headache, frightening dreams and making blood flow from the orifices.

While neither of these specific combinations are found in the ciphers, such instructions set a precedent for selecting and expanding certain Seals in particular ways – including five single-letter repeats of the split-*hāʾ* (*abjad* value 5) – to achieve particular magical ends. And five split- or unsplit-*hāʾ*s is of course is precisely what we find at the start of the ciphers; it is a five-fold expansion of the first Seal, which in the *Dīwān* prototype is simply a *hāʾ* (Fig. 1b). Since expansions of three, five, seven and nine are potent in talismanic terms,[141] with pentads and heptads assuming particular importance,[142,143] it is perhaps no surprise that the other expansion in the ciphers is a run of seven characters. After all, what better multiplicity could one find in a descendant of the Seven Seals? While we might have expected a *zāī* to fulfil this role (ز , *abjad* value 7), the repeated character is actually a medial-form *ʿayn* (ـع, abjad value 70 but sometimes simply 7, see above) because this glyph more closely approximates the core of the fourth Seal (♮ or #) from which it is in fact derived.

Although the proposed evolution of the ciphers from the Seven Seals prototype in the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* explains much of their overall structure, it leaves unaddressed two of the most baffling elements of the ciphers and the Pleiades Square: the seed-eating bird and the "esoteric word" *ṬĪRŪṬAT*. These remaining mysteries will be explored in the next two sections.

**The ciphers indirectly link the Seven Seals with the Pleiades**

So far, the evidence within the ciphers themselves for a link to the Pleiades has consisted solely of the seven-dotted cross, which (as we saw above) most likely evolved out of an older four-dotted form linked to fertility. The new sidereal association is supported by the resemblance of an X-shaped cross to a simplified star, and the fact that such shapes are often presumed to represent stars in ancient petroglyphs.[144] But the starry cross may not be the only feature of the cipher that establishes a link with the Pleiades.

Beyond their worldwide recognition as seven young women, often sisters, there is a pervasive identification of the Pleiades with birds.[145] In Greek mythology, Zeus turned the sisters into doves,[146] and in Homer's Odyssey they are described as "seven doves that start out from the west with ambrosia for the infant Zeus."[147] Their identification as birds stretches from England, Scandinavia[148] and Eastern Europe[149] to Thailand,[150] Japan,[151] Polynesia, and Aboriginal Australia.[152] One widespread interpretation of the Seven Stars is as a hen with her chicks, to the extent that Greek astronomers no longer see the star-group as *Peleiades*, a flock of doves, but rather as *Pouleia*, the Hen-Coop.[153] Writing in 1899, Richard Allen recorded that "Aben Ragel and other Hebrew writers[154] thus mentioned them, sometimes with the Coop that held them – the *Massa Gallinae* of the Middle Ages – these also appearing in Arabic folk-lore, and still current among the English peasantry."[155] Indeed, England's Coverdale Bible of 1535 contains a marginal note to a mention of the Pleiades (Job 9:9) that reads "some call these vii starres, the clock henne with hir chickens."[156] But in the context of Islamic talismans, the more important point is the confirmation that the Pleiades – *al-Thurayyā* in modern Arabic – were also so regarded in the medieval Muslim world. The 11th-century CE Tunisian astrologer ʾAbū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn ʾAbū al-Rijāl,[157] glossed above by the Latin name Aben Ragel, wrote of them: "*Al Thuraiya* is the mansion of the moon, in the sign Taurus, and it is called the celestial hen with her chickens."[158]

The identification of the Pleiades as birds – most often as doves or chickens – means that the appearance of a seed-eating bird in the cipher series is most likely a further reference to this star-cluster. Sometimes the bird is even positioned next to the seven-starred cross, as with the chicken-like creature in Fig. 3c(ii). In Fig. 4a(ii), the huge bird calligram stands with its feet positioned after the repeated *ʿayn* and letter *wāw* of the cipher. In this case, the bird that dominates the talisman resembles a pigeon or dove with a twig in its beak, perhaps a reference to the dove that returned to Noah's ark bearing an olive or date branch as proof that dry land had been found.[159,160]

An association between the Seven Seals and the Pleiades has not previously been suggested. In Islamic and Jewish magic, the usual astronomical cognates of the Seven Seals are the seven classical planets.[161] In turn, this correspondence links each Seal to a particular day of the week, specific physical properties, individual angels, and so on. An association between the Seals and other astronomical "sets of seven" is not unreasonable; for example, one source (of uncertain antiquity) indirectly associates each of the Jewish Seal-names (mentioned above) with one of the seven stars of Ursa Major.[162] There is as yet no evidence to suggest that each seal was identified specifically with a particular star in the Pleiades cluster. The magical import of the Pleiades, and their relevance to talismanic healing, has already been discussed in detail (see above, *Use of the ciphers: the dotted cross*).

### *ṬĪRŪṬAT* potentially reinforces the Seal–Pleiades connection

In the Pleiades Square, only the obscure word *ṬĪRŪṬAT* (ط ي ر و ط ت) remains in need of explanation. Given that the conjunction "and" is served in Arabic by the letter *wāw* (و, transliterated *ū* or *w*) it makes sense to consider this string of disconnected letters not as a single "esoteric word" but as a compound of two words, *Ṭīr* and *Ṭat*, just the Qūrʾānic phrase "Strong, Severe" is in Islamic talismans often fused into a single string of disconnected letters.[163] In the case of *ṬĪRŪṬAT* there is immediate support for this, in that the first three letters (ط ي ر) spell the normal Arabic word for "bird," usually transliterated *ṭair*.[164] In view of the adjacent seed-eating bird in the talisman, this makes perfect sense. The word carries a secondary sense of augury and omen, which also fits the present context.

The final syllable of the compound, *Ṭat* (طت), is not a normal Arabic word or root, so no translation is forthcoming,[165] but it is familiar from another context – the Jewish names of the first two Seals, *Yaṭat* and *Ṭat* (see above, *A* Diwan*-like Seal series on a recent Kabbalah talisman*). The letter equivalence between the Hebrew and Arabic is exact. In this setting, *Ṭat* serves as a Divine Name;[166] sometimes the first four Seal names are even found interposed between the words that comprise the Hebrew 22-letter Name of God.[167] In Islamic magic, the second Seal (Jewish *Ṭat*) is interpreted by al-Tilimsānī in terms of God's ability to create, the three vertical strokes representing material duality springing from the Divine singularity: "For all created things You have made them as pairs [examples omitted], so it is for everything that Your power has created, O Mighty, O Wonderful."[168] In Arabic grimoires, the word *Ṭat* features amongst the *nomina barbara* of magical invocations, where again it is linked to God's creative power. For example, *Ṭat* (طت) appears four times in *Kitab al-ʾAjnās*,[169] a book attributed to the vizier of King Solomon (to whom in turn the Seven Seals are traditionally ascribed). In this treatise, a conjuration to one of the *jinn* kings reads 'Haste, O Burqān, by the right of these names with which the Divine One

created you, *Hīt*, *Hīt*, *Ḥat*, *Ḥat*, *Aywāt*, *Ṭat*, *Ṭat*, *Ṭatiyah* …" The pair *Ṭat*, *Ṭatiyah* ( طت طتيه ) is reminiscent of *Ṭat Yaṭat*, the Jewish second and first Seal-names, respectively, although here the *ya(h)* is a suffix rather than a prefix,[170] as found in the third/fourth Seal pair (*Saṭiṭ Saṭiṭyah*). Occurrences of *Ṭat* in other profound contexts support the view that it embodies the creative aspect of God.[171]

While explanations of *voces magicae* nearly always involve an unhealthy amount of speculation, we can see here that the word *ṬĪRŪṬAT* potentially invokes both the beneficence of the bird-like Pleiades and the spark of Divine creation, the latter via a power-name identified with two of the Seven Seals. If this is correct, the compound word *ṬĪRŪṬAT* augments the cipher-associated bird imagery and seven-dotted cross by providing a further link between the Seals and the Pleiades.

**Seven Stars and Seven Seals**

While the prototype Seal series in the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* was soon supplanted by the now canonical version of the Seven Seals, we have seen that it left an unexpected legacy in the form of the repeat-letter ciphers. An interesting consequence of the Seal–cipher relationship is that it indirectly pairs the Seven Seals with the seven stars of the Pleiades. The combination is oddly reminiscent of the seven stars/seals nexus in the New Testament's *Book of Revelation*, specifically Rev 1-6:

> [I] heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" […] And I turned to see the voice that spake with me […] and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like the Son of man […] and he had in his right hand seven stars […] The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches. (Rev 1:10-20)
>
> And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back side, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. […] And one of the elders saith unto me, "Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." […] And I saw when the lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, "Come and see." (Rev 5:1-6:1)

The biblical passage then continues with the appearance of the well-known four horsemen, who accompany the breaking of the first four seals on the book/scroll, and other cataclysms associated with the opening of the three remaining seals. In his detailed analysis of the astral imagery in *Revelation*, Prof. Bruce Malina identifies the seven stars in the hand of the Son of man with the Pleiades, which "in the ancient Middle East [were] very often depicted on various cylinder seals and steles […and were] a basic sky sign for […] human survival."[172]

Given the proximity of the Pleiades to both the Seven Seal symbols of Judaism/Islam and the seven seals adorning the scroll in the Apocalypse, it is tempting to ask whether there might be a more direct connection between the two sets of seals. This is not the first hint of such a link. It is in fact possible to develop a detailed correspondence between the two sets of seals

using shared astronomical associations, although in this case the correlation is planetary rather than sidereal.[173]

## Conclusion

Although the prototype Seal series in the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* was soon supplanted by the now canonical version of the Seven Seals, the series survived in a disguised form. Specifically, degradation of the *Dīwān* symbol series by copying errors and scribal liberties gave rise to the repeat-letter ciphers, which form an integral part of Shīʿa talismanic plaques and rings still sold today. The ciphers' origin in the Seven Seals and their recurring association with the seven stars of the Pleiades suggests that there may once have been a link between these two auspicious heptads.

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## Endnotes

Unless otherwise stated, online resources were accessed in September 2011. "Brockelmann, *GAL*" refers to Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur*, Brill, Leiden, with volume dates as follows: I, 1943; II, 1949; S-I, 1937, S-II, 1938.

[1] M. Gaster, 1936, "Review of *Siegel und Charaktere in der Mohammedanischen Zauberei* by H. A. Winkler," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 68, 131-133.

[2] Arabic transliteration follows the widely adopted system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*), except for a few words where alternative renderings are better established. All Arabic in the text should be read right-to-left, even if the segment is just several Arabic letters being listed separately.

[3] Georges C. Anawati, 1967, "Le Nom Supreme de Dieu (*ism Allāh al-aʿẓam*)," In: *Atti del Terzo Congresso di Studi Arabi e Islamici: Ravello, 1-6 Settembre 1966*, Instituto Universitario Orientale, Naples, 7-58.

[4] Hans A. Winkler, 2006, *Siegel und Charaktere in der Mohammedanischen Zauberei*, Geheimes Wissen, Graz, Austria, 76-195. I cite this modern reprinting by M. Munteanu rather than the 1930 Berlin edition of Walter de Gruyter & Co. as it inexpensive and still in print, unlike the original book. Note that the pagination of the original is not preserved.

[5] Tewfik Canaan, 2004, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," In: *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, Ashgate Variorum, Aldershot, p.125-166 & 167-177, at 169-172. Originally published in *Berytus Archaeological Studies* 4 (1937), 69-110 & 5 (1938), 141-151.

[6] Edmond Doutté, 1908, *Magie et Religion dans l'Afrique du Nord*, Adolphe Jourdan, Algiers, p.156. A facsimile reprinting published in 1984 by J. Maisonneuve & P. Geuthner, Paris, is more widely available.

[7] Jan Just Witkam, 2007, "Gazing at the Sun: Remarks on the Egyptian Magician al-Būnī and his Work," In: *O Ye Gentlemen: Arabic Studies on Science and Literary Culture*, eds. A. Vrolijk & J.P. Hogendijk , Brill, Leiden, p.183-200.

[8] Edgar W. Francis IV, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals for Protection and Healing: Religion and Magic in the Writings of Ahmad ibn Ali al Buni (d. 622/1225),* PhD Dissertation, Univ. California Los Angeles, Los Angeles.

[9] E.g., Aḥmad al-Būnī (d. 1225 CE), author of the *Shams al-Maʿārif*. The concept of the Greatest Name was also of particular significance to Saʿid Nūrsī (d. 1960 CE), author of the famous *Risāle-i Nūr* collection and of a commentary on the Beautiful Names of Allāh [e.g., *Ism-i Azam*, Sözler, Istanbul, 2003].

[10] Stephen N. Lambden, 2008/9, "Translations from the Writings of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī (d. 1259/1843) *Risālah fī Sharḥ wa Tafsīr ism al-Aʿẓam*: A Treatise in Explanation and Commentary upon [a Shīʿī graphical form of] the Mightiest Name of God, by Sayyid Kāẓim al-Husayni al-Rashtī (d. 1259/1843)." Online at http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/SHAYKHISM/Rashti..htm

[11] One concrete example consists of an undated gemstone engraved with the Seven Seals surrounded by the names of the Twelve Imams. Andreas Mordtmann, 1864, "Studien über geschnittene Steine mit Pehlevi-Inschriften," *Zeitschrift der Deutchen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 18 (13), 1-52, at 51, no. XIII and Table VI, no. XIV.

[12] Denis MacEoin, 1994, *Rituals in Babism and Bahaʾism*, Pembroke Persian Papers, vol. 2., British Academic Press, London, p.22-23 & 49-50.

[13] Stephen N. Lambden, 2009/10, "Some Notes on Islamic Concepts of the *al-Ism al-Aʿẓam*, the Mightiest, Greatest or Supreme Name of God : From the Islamic Solomon (*fl*. 10th cent. BCE) to Imam ʿAlī (d. 40/661) and Beyond." Online at http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/PAPERS/GREATEST%20NAME/CHAOTER%20FOUR%20-%20ISLAMIC%20LITERATURES.htm; also Lambden, "Translations from the writings of Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī."

[14] Wahid Azal, 2009, "The True Greatest Name (*Ism-i-Aʿzam*) Symbol." Online at http://www.iranian.com/main/blog/nur/true-greatest-name-ism-i-azam-symbol.

[15] Online at http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1204491,00.html, http://www.iman-abdullah-mahmud.com/english.php and http://www.artreview.com/profile/ImanMahmud.

[16] Frances Harrison and Nineveh Shadrach, 2005, *Magic That Works – Practical Training for the Children of Light*, Ishtar, Vancouver, p.47-8, 66, 134 & 244-269.

[17] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.126 fn. 2. Doutté, *Magie et Religion*, p.155 fn. 1 cites p.58 in the edition of the *Shumūs* at his disposal, whose provenance is uncertain. In a lithograph edition bearing the date 737 AH (1337 CE) on the title page, the erroneous table appears on p.72.

[18] Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥājj al-Fāsī al-ʿAbdarī al-Qayrawānī al-Tilimsānī al-Magribī al-Mālikī [Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p. 113; Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun," at 198 fn. 47] is generally presumed to be the author of the *Shumūs al-ʾAnwār wa Kunūz al-ʾAsrār al-Kubrā* [Brockelmann, *GAL* II, p.101] although arguments for different authorships exist [Brockelmann, *GAL* S-II, p.95; Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.113 fn. 5]. The *Arbatel of Magic* is allegedly based on this book [Willy Schroedter, 1992, *A Rosicrucian Notebook: the Secret Sciences used by Members of the Order*, Weiser Books, San Francisco, p.160 fn. 5].

[19] Doutté, *Magie et Religion*, p.154. Although the anomaly was highlighted by W. B. Stevenson, 1920 ["Some Specimens of Moslem Charms," *Studia Semitica et Orientalia* (Glasgow University Oriental Society), 84-114, at 112 fn. 2], the error has since been perpetuated in the German-speaking world by Rudolf Kriss & Hubert Kriss-Heinrich, 1962, *Volksglaube im Bereich des Islam*, vol. 2 (*Amulette, Zauberformeln und Beschwörungen*), Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, p.81; and in the Francophone world by Jean Marques-Riviere, 1950, *Amulettes, Talismans et Pantacles*, Payot, Paris, p.124 and Jacques Bersez, 2002, *Magie Arabe*, Librairie de l'Inconnu, Paris, p.94.

[20] E. A. Wallis Budge, 1978, *Amulets and Superstitions*, Dover, New York, p.40. I cite this reprinting of the 1930 original as it is much more readily available.

[21] Brockelmann, GAL I, p.38-39.

[22] Brockelmann, GAL I, p.39 & S-I, p.74.

[23] Quṭb al-Dīn ʾAbū al-Ḥussain Saʿīd bin Hibatallāh bin al-Ḥasan al-Rāwandī, a Shīʿa scholar of considerable repute. See Brockelmann, GAL S-I, p.74; also entry 2507 in Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library catalogue (India), *Poetry and Elegant Prose - vol. 23*, online at http://kblibrary.nic.in/Vol23/BP006.htm

[24] Juya Jahan-Bakhsh, n.d., "Quṭb al-Dīn al-Kaydarī and his *Anwār al-ʿUqūl*," *Hadith Sciences Magazine* no. 12, online at http://www.darolhadith.net/modules.php?name=my_Magazine&mop=mnal&pid=9&gid=38&tid=3

[25] Brockelmann, GAL I, p.39. al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, more completely known as ʾAbū al-Qāsim ʿAlī ibn Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥussain al-Sharīf, was a major scholar of the Buyid Dynasty; his lineage can be traced back to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib [Carl Brockelmann, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-ʿArabī* (trans. Mahmoud Fahmi Hijazi), Egypt, 1993, p.131]. "Sharif Murtada" is given as the editor of a manuscript in the John Rylands Library called the *Diwan of Ali* (*Diwan ʻAli ibn Abi Talib*) [A. Mingana, 1934, *Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, Manchester, p.250). For example, see online at http://www.sothebys.com/fr/catalogues/ecatalogue.html/2009/arts-of-the-islamic-world-l09721#/r=/fr/ecat.fhtml.L09721.html+r.m=/fr/ecat.lot.L09721.html/19/+r.o=/fr/ecat.notes.L09721.html/19/

[26] Heinrich Ewald, 1839, "Über die Sammlung Arabischer und Syrischer Handschriften in *British Museum*," *Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 2, 190-214, at 192-200.

[27] Joseph T. Reinaud, 1828, *Description des Monumens Arabes, Persans et Turcs, du Cabinet de M. le Duc de Blacas et d'autres Cabinets*, vol. 2, L'Imprimerie Royale, Paris, p.245.

[28] Brockelmann, GAL I, p.39; Clèment Huart, 1903, *A History of Arabic Literature*, D. Appleton & Co., New York, p.253. The *Dīwān* is generally considered to be a medieval composition [Geert Mommersteeg, 1988, "'He Has Smitten Her to the Heart with Love.' The Fabrication of an Islamic Love-Amulet in West Africa," *Anthropos* 83, 501-510].

[29] ʾAbū Ḥāmed Muḥammad al-Ghazali, *al-Bahjat al-Sanīyah fi Sharḥ Daʿwat al-Jaljalūtīah*.

[30] Doutté, *Magie et Religion*, p.139-142.

[31] Nineveh Shadrach, 2005, *Magick Manuscripts (Arabic Collection)*, vol. 1, Ishtar Publishing, Vancouver, preface. eBook (2010) available from e.g. http://kobobooks.com/ebook/Magick-Manuscript-Collection-Volume-One/book-OLBf37CXYkuYFcNVBzvPqw/page1.html.

[32] Saʿid Nūrsī subscribed to this view; for example, see Section II.A.2.g online at http://www.nur.org/en/nurcenter/nurlibrary/Views_on_Kalam_as_Illustrated_in_the_Risale_i_Nur_212#NOTE19. In addition, Nūrsī considered the *Jaljalūtīah* conjuration to be the primary source of Arabic numerology, i.e. *jafr* (for divination of future events) and *abjad* reckoning (relating to past and present events), by which the hidden meanings of Qurʾānic verses might be made known.

[33] Anawati, "Le Nom Supreme," p.28.

[34] E.g. Imâm al-Ghazâlî ,1987, *Celcelûtiye Duasi – Havâs ve Esrâri*, Pamuk Yayincilik, Istanbul (ISBN 9756594640).

[35] Doutté, *Magie et Religion*, p.155.

[36] E.g. Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.91-92.

[37] E.g. Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.102-105; Anawati, "Le Nom Supreme," p.28.

[38] Jan Just Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun;" Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals.*

[39] *Sharḥ al-Jaljalūtīah al-Kubrā* (Commentary on the Long *Jaljalūtīah*) is one of the four books comprising al-Būnī's *Manbaʿ Uṣūl al-Ḥikma*, al-Qāhira, Cairo, p.91-325. This is the same edition as that cited by Alexander Fodor [A. Fodor, 2004, "The Rod of Moses in Arabic Magic," In: *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, Ashgate Variorum, Aldershot, p.103-123] and is probably the Cairo 1951 printing by Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī [Witkam, "Gazing at the Sun," 198].

[40] Muḥammad Muḥsin Āghā Buzurg al-Ṭihrānī, 1936, *al-Dharīʿa ilā Taṣānīf al-Shiʿa*, Maṭbaʿat al-Gharī, vol. 3, Najaf, Iraq, p.203-204.

[41] The first four lines are identical or similar, having the same meaning; see Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.88-89, cf. p.92-94; Ingrid Hehmeyer, 2008, "Water and Sign Magic in al-Jabin, Yemen," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 25, 82-96, at 87; H. Henry Spoer, 1935 , "Arabic Magic Medicinal Bowls," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 55, 237-256, at 244. The differences relate to the later symbols, i.e. those to the left of the fourth Seal (# or ♮).

[42] Translation by the present author; cf. Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.88 for a German translation. The symbol sequence described in this version of the poem is also outlined by Spoer, "Arabic Magic Medicinal Bowls," 240. For a full translation of the contrasting "orthodox" version of the poem in English, see Spoer, "Arabic Magic Medicinal Bowls," 244; Tewfik Canaan, 1936, "Arabic Magic Bowls," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 16, 79-127, at 97; MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Bahāʾism*, p.145; and Venetia Porter, 1998, "Islamic Seals: Magical or Practical?" In: *University Lectures in Islamic*

*Studies*, vol. 2, ed. A. Jones, Altajir World of Islam Trust, London, p.135-149 (whose version is reproduced in Hehmeyer, "Water and Sign Magic," 86).

[43] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.89-90; reiterated in English by Hehmeyer, "Water and Sign Magic."

[44] J. McG. Dawkins, 1944, "The Seal of Solomon," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 76, 145-150, at 146.

[45] Spoer, "Arabic Magic Medicinal Bowls," 240 & 244.

[46] Arabic letters adopt different forms depending upon their position in a word (initial, medial, and final forms) or their independence from a word (isolated form).

[47] The identity of the small circular form of the first seal as an isolated *hāʾ* is established by Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.153 & 176-178, and reiterated in English by Hehmeyer, 2008, "Water and Sign Magic," 87-88.

[48] The sixth canonical seal is a split-*hāʾ*; as attested by its shape and the references in note 41.

[49] Heinrich Ewald, 1839, "Eine Himjaritische Inschrift," *Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 2 , 107-109.

[50] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.89; Hehmeyer, "Water and Sign Magic."

[51] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.89.

[52] Imām Amīn ʾAbū ʿAlī Faḍl ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī died in 1153 CE; online at http://www.imamreza.net/eng/imamreza.php?id=6729; Anawati, "Le Nom Supreme," 29 fn. 29 gives him as Raḍī al-Dīn ʾAbū ʿAlī al-Faḍl al-Ṭabarsī, and assigns his death to 1153 or 1157 CE.

[53] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.151-152. Another text that was potentially composed in the early 12th century CE and contains ʿAlī's poem is the *Risālat al-Ism al-Aʿẓam*, an Ismāʾīli commentary on the Mightiest Name of God; however, in the early manuscript in which this work survives, the poem conforms to the versions presented by al-Būnī rather than the one in the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* (Brit. Mus. 577 Add. 7534). See Stephen Lambden, n.d., "Tāqī al-Dīn Kafʿamī (d. 900/1494-5) on the Mightiest Name of God," online at http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/03-Biblical-islam-BBst/GREATEST%20NAME/GN-al-Kaf%60ami.htm, Section 59. This section is an analysis and partial translation of Rudolph Strothmann, ed., 1943, *Risālat al-Ism al-Aʿẓam*, In: *Gnosis-Texte der Ismailiten: Arabische Handschrift Ambrosiana*, vol. 75, [Abhandlungen Der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, Series 3, No. 28], Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, p.171-176.

[54] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.89 fn. 3. Winker incorrectly identifies the first location in *Kitāb al-Muḥaqqiq* as p.84, whereas it is actually p.87 (see following note).

[55] *Kitāb al-Muḥaqqiq al-Mudaqqiq al-Yūnānī al-Failasūf al-Shahīr bi-Abī Maʿṣhar al-Falakī*, Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥusainīya, Cairo lithograph of *ca*. 1910, p. 87, 96 & 97. The book, which is also known as *al-Qawl fī al-Numūdhārāt*, contains a number of talismanic character sequences involving Seven Seal glyphs and other symbols, including one very similar to the canonical series (p.84). The real Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad al-Balkhī ʾAbū Maʿshar died in 886 CE.

[56] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.155 (series 19) & 177. The Arabic symbol shown in the text is actually a *lām-ʾalif* ligature; it has been used here to approximate the shape of the final *hāʾ* shown later in Fig. 5a(i) because the latter (a variant of the letter's usual form) is not available in the word processor. For the variety of shapes adopted by *hāʾ* in talismans, see Canaan, "Arabic Magic Bowls," 95 (Fig. 8b).

[57] It is given (in addition to the canonical series) in many versions of al-Būnī's *Shams al-Maʾarif*, e.g., in a 17th century CE manuscript copy in the author's collection, in printed/lithographed copies (p.82 in the Egyptian lithograph of 1886; Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.152, series 20), and as reported by Doutté, *Magie et Religion*, p.155). This series is closely mimicked in two other published versions (Book 1, p.82, in the "al-Ḥusaynī" lithograph/printed edition, Muḥammad ʿAlī Ṣubayḥ wa-ʾAwlāduh, Cairo, 1927-8 CE; Winkler *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.152, series 21).

[58] The position of the split-*hāʾ* and *wāw* relative to the "four strokes" Seal is the primary determinant of whether a Seal sequence is classified as canonical or related to the *Dīwān of ʿAlī* prototype.

[59] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.151-180; Hehmeyer, "Water and Sign Magic," 87-89; Spoer, "Arabic Magic Medicinal Bowls," 240.

[60] Paul A. Mirecki and Marvin W. Meyer, 2002, *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, Brill, Leiden, p.429 fn. 7

[61] Angela Fisher, 1984, *Africa Adorned*, Collins, London, p.294-298.

[62] The stamped symbol repertoire may have originated with the Tuareg or other Islamic peoples of the semi-desert regions of the southern Sahara (lower Mali, Niger, and northern Nigeria), as jewelry from these groups is often traded into Ethiopia, where the designs are copied [Fisher, *Africa Adorned*, p.278-279]. Alternatively, the symbols may be indigenous to the local Muslim people. The people of Jimma are thought to have had little contact with or influence from Islamic traders, and Fisher observes that Ethiopian highland jewelry incorporates symbols first recorded in gold jewelry from Aksum, 300 CE [Fisher, *Africa Adorned*, p.294].

[63] Aryeh Kaplan, 1985, *Meditation and Kabbalah*, Red Wheel/Weiser, San Francisco, p.138 & 266.

[64] Gabriella Samuel, 2007, "The Seven Mystical Seals," In: *The Kabbalah Handbook*, Tarcher/Penguin, New York/London, p.301.

[65] The transliteration of Hebrew follows standard Israeli practice ("Common Israeli Xlit," online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanization_of_Hebrew); however, since it is important to discriminate between the two letters for *t*-sounds (i.e., ט and ת) used in Seal names, these are distinguished according to International standard ISO 259 as *ṭ* and *t*, respectively ("ISO 259 Xlit," on same webpage). All Hebrew in the text should be read right-to-left.

[66] Source Hebrew in refs. (1)-(4) of note 68 below. Romanized forms (from which the vowel sounds used here are taken) appear in Aryeh Kaplan, 1997, *Sefer Yetzirah – the Book of Creation in Theory and Practice*, Red Wheel/Weiser, San Francisco, p.172; also Gabriella Samuel, 2007, "The Seven Mystical Seals," p.301.

[67] A typical printed series is shown in Fig. 1a of Lloyd D. Graham, 2010, "The Seven Seals of Revelation and the Seven Classical Planets," *Esoteric Quarterly* 6, 45-58. Online at http://www.esotericquarterly.com/issues/EQ06/EQ0602/EQ060210-Graham.pdf.

[68] Based on a survey of 16 historical instances in the following works. **(1)** Rabbi Isaac of Acco (attrib.) [transl. title:] *The Functional Names, Making Amulets, Spells, etc.: Excerpts from Practical Kabbalah*, Moscow-Günzburg 775, 14-15th century CE; with thanks to Russian State Library, Moscow, and the Jewish National and University Library, Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Ms. R.R. Film No. F4194, IMHM record 000069800. **(2)** Joseph Tirshom, *Shoshan Yesod Olam*, Bibliothèque de Genève, Comites Latentes 145, 15-16th century CE; with thanks to Bibliothèque de Genève and the Jewish National and University Library, Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, Ms. R.R. Film Nos. F9273, F39891, COP22, PH3910, CD77, CD89; IMHM record 000133810. **(3)** Eliahu ben Moshe Loans and Joel ben Isaac Halpern, *Toldot Adam*, 1st edn. 1720 CE, Zholkva/Zolkiev, Ukraine; 2nd edn. 1872 CE, S.L. Kugel, Lewin & Co. (printed by A. Yerleger), Lemberg/Lviv, Ukraine. **(4)** Moses ben Mordecai Zacuto, 1999, *Shorshei haShemot*, Hotzaat Nezer Shraga, Jerusalem; reprint of a 17th century CE book on Divine Names.

**Note added post-publication:** One instance that – at first sight – resembles an exception is found in a template for an amulet against miscarriage, given in the *Sefer ha-Razīm* section of NYPL Heb. 190, p.33 (in the numbering at bottom centre of the page), which dates to 1465-8 CE. This instance shows a Seal series followed by a proto-hexagram (formed by two intersecting triangles), with a lunettised hexagram (i.e., one bearing small cicles at its vertices, in the manner of a *charaktère*) below the first two Seals and an incomplete lunettised double-hexagram below the sixth Seal. Since the first Seal is present explicitly in the series as a small unadorned triangle, the large hexagram-like motifs that surround the series are probably best viewed as extraneous additions. Their presence may well reflect some awareness of Islamic Seal series that begin and end with hexagrams or pentagrams. Sources: (a) New York Public Library, Dorot Jewish Division, catalog entry online at http://catalog.nypl.org/record=b16142874~S1, accessed 28 Jun, 2014; (b) Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, ms. R.R. Film No. F9347, IMHM record 000062327.

[69] See note 46 on the different forms of Arabic letters such as *hā'*. For Winkler's discussion of the canonical first and sixth Seals, see notes 47, 48 and 59, and Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.94, 103, & 187-192.

[70] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.151-180; Hehmeyer, "Water and Sign Magic," 87-89; Spoer, "Arabic Magic Medicinal Bowls," 240.

[71] Writing in Hebrew, the Kabbalist may not have been equally familiar with Arabic letters. In any case, there is a tendency for these similar-looking characters to become clustered even in Islamic talismans, both within Seal series (Fig. 5b, lower line) and repeat-letter ciphers (Fig. 3).

[72] In one of his books, Aryeh Kaplan draws the Jewish Seven Seals with a bar over the four strokes [Kaplan, *Sefer Yetzirah*, p.172], and this version has been perpetuated by other authors [Samuel, "The Seven Mystical Seals," p.301; Miriam Maron, 2005, *AngelSong* CD cover art, online at www.miriamscyberwell.com]. However, this feature is as rare in Jewish series as it is in Islamic ones; in 16 historical instances of the former (see note 68), just one has an over-bar on the fifth Seal. The practice of substituting a variant spelling of a sacred Name out of reverence for the authentic form is common practice today amongst Orthodox Jews [Gabriella Samuel, "Sacred Names of G-d," In: *The Kabbalah Handbook*, Tarcher/Penguin, New York/London, p.284], and *mekubalim* extend this tradition of variation to graphic depictions as well [Rabbi Miriam Maron, pers. comm.].

[73] E.g., Carla Sfameni, 2001, "Magic Syncretism in the Late Antiquity: Some Examples from Papyri and Magical Gems," *ʾIlu – Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones* 6, 183-199.

[74] Stephen M. Wasserstrom, 2005, "The Unwritten Chapter: Notes towards a Social and Religious History of Geniza Magic," In: *Officina Magica: Essays on the Practice of Magic in Antiquity*, ed. Shaul Shaked, Brill, Leiden, p.269-294.

[75] Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," 159.

[76] Nineveh Shadrach, 2006, *Healing Love Prosperity through Occult Powers of the Alphabet*, Ishtar, Vancouver, p.114.

[77] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, p.143 & 207-8.

[78] E.g., Georges C. Anawati, 1972, "Trois Talismans Musulmans en Arabe provenant du Mali (Marché de Mopti)," *Annales Islamologiques*, 287-339, at 302.

[79] Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," 162.

[80] Jacques Misguich and Grégoire Misguich, 2002, "Carrés Magiques Indo-Arabes et Tortue Chinoise de Lho Shu," online at http://membres.multimania.fr/fusionbfr/JHM/CM/CM1.html, Jan 2005 revision, p.42 of 46. Another example occurs on a Berber silver medallion in the collection of the present author.

[81] E.g., Oslo Univ. Library Papyrus Collection, P. Oslo 1, col. vii, online at http://www.uio.no/english/about/news-and-events/events/other-events/2010/papyrus-exhibition.html. For another example, see Kurt Rudolph, 1984, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, p.223; figure reproduced by Katherine Schaefers, 2011, "Gnostic Imagery from the Beginning of our Era to Today," *The Rose+Croix Journal* 8, 99-123, at 115 (Fig. 11). Post-printing addendum: In some contexts the cross-with-four-dots may have served more as an editorial or critical sign than as a magic symbol; see Kirsten Dzwiza, 2012, "Der Asteriskos als Kritisches Zeichen in Magischen Texten – Acht Beispiele in PGM VII und PGM XCIV," Acta Classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis XLVIII, 149-165, online at http://uni-heidelberg.academia.edu/KirstenDzwiza/Papers/1955777/Der_Asteriskos_als_kritisches_Zeichen_in_magischen_Texten_-_Acht_Beispiele_in_PGM_VII_und_PGM_XCIV.

[82] Marija Gimbutas, 1987, "The Earth Fertility of Old Europe," In: *Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne* 13, p.11-69, at p.14-15, 31 & 48; Online via Persée at doi:10.3406/dha.1987.1750, http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/dha_0755-7256_1987_num_13_1_1750.

[83] al-Būnī, *Manbaʿ*, p.232 & 263.

[84] Shadrach, *Healing Love Prosperity*, p.110. Shadrach's reproduction combines the Pleiades Square with another talisman containing two numerical "magic squares" and the canonical Seven Seals, taken from elsewhere in the *Manbaʿ* (p.181).

[85] Shadrach, *Healing Love Prosperity*, p. 109 & 114.

[86] Shadrach, *Healing Love Prosperity*, p. 114.

[87] The bird-with-seed image appears to reside within a much expanded form of the second 'crossed swords' motif.

[88] Shadrach, *Healing Love Prosperity*, p. 114.

[89] Both words are shown here using disconnected Arabic letters, since this is how they appear in the talisman. The use of isolated letters is common in Islamic talismans, as it is considered to increase the potency of the invocation. See, e.g., Lloyd D. Graham, "Qurʾānic Spell-ing: Disconnected Letter Series in Islamic Talismans," online at http://www.academia.edu/516626/Qur_anic_Spell-ing_Disconnected_Letter_Series_in_Islamic_Talismans.

[90] E.g., Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 47 & 239-241; Shadrach, *Healing Love Prosperity*, 112; Graham, "Qurʾānic Spell-ing," 18-27; al-Būnī, *Manbaʿ*, p.181, 177, 179, 254, 259 & 264.

[91] Online at http://www.el7akeem.com/vb/post65160-1/.

[92] MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Bahaʾism*, p.146. Another version of the repeat-letter ciphers occurs in an Arabic amulet from Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina) against diseases and epidemics, appearing immediately before the Seven Seals (into which two magic squares have been interpolated); see Kriss & Kriss-Heinrich, 1962, *Volksglaube im Bereich des Islam*, vol. 2, p.103 & Fig. 99.

[93] Kombizz Kashani, online at http://photo.net/photodb/photo?photo_id=12764398 and http://www.elkgrovecity.mobi/photos/kombizz/5479416086/in/photostream/?imz_ed=www.flickr.com&imz_s=12b90bc32a607fb6e615e1299226a52c.

[94] *Ibid*.; also online at http://spiritussanctuary.blogspot.com/2009/10/blog-post_30.html.

[95] Alexander Fodor, 1987/8, "A Group of Iraqi Arm Amulets (Popular Islam in Mesopotamia)," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 5/6 (Gli Arabi nella Storia: Tanti Popoli una Sola Civiltà), 259-277, at 266-267; in relation to Iran, see online at http://www.realitysandwich.com/fatimiya_sufi_ayahuasca. Collectively, the seven Seals in standard order (Fig. 1a) seem to have a solar character, in that the 7 x 7 magic square of Seals whose top row contains this sequence forms the Square of the Sun [e.g., Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, p.257], while the 7 x 7 table of correspondences linking the Seals to days, planets, angels, etc., which has the same top row, is called *djadwal daʿwat al-shams*, i.e. the "Table of Summoning the Sun" [Mommersteeg, "'He Has Smitten Her to the Heart with Love,'" 505; Doutté, *Magie et Religion*, p.155-155 (where the the Seals are printed in the wrong order, see Fig. 1f)].

[96] As for note 94.

[97] Online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basmala.

[98] MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Bahaʾism*, p.146.

[99] Shadrach, *Healing Love Prosperity*, p.109-110.

[100] Online at http://www.el7akeem.com/vb/post65160-1/.

[101] Gimbutas, "The Earth Fertility of Old Europe," p.14-15, 31 & 48.

[102] Gimbutas, "The Earth Fertility of Old Europe," p.14-15.

[103] Gimbutas, "The Earth Fertility of Old Europe," p.31 & 48.

[104] Munya Andrews, 2005, *The Seven Sisters of the Pleiades: Stories from Around the World*, Spinifex Press, Australia, p.42-44.

[105] Daniel M. Varisco, Islamic Folk Astronomy #4: "The Pleiades in Arab Folklore," Tabsir: Insight on Islam and the Middle East, online at http://tabsir.net/?p=1079 ; Daniel M. Varisco, Islamic Folk Astronomy #5: "The Pleiades Conjunction Calendar," Tabsir: Insight on Islam and the Middle East, online at http://tabsir.net/?p=1080. Both are excerpts from Daniel M. Varisco, 2000, "Islamic Folk Astronomy," In: *The History of Non-Western Astronomy: Astronomy Across Cultures*, ed. Helaine Selin, Kluwer Academic, Dordrecht, p.615-650.

[106] Alois Musil, 1928, *The Manners and Customs of the Rwala Bedouins,* American Geographical Society, New York, p.9. Cited by Varisco, "The Pleiades in Arab Folklore."

[107] ʾAbū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh ibn Qutayba, 1956, *Kitāb al-Anwāʾ*, Maṭbaʿat Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmānīya, Hyderabad, p.24. Cited by Varisco, "The Pleiades in Arab Folklore."

[108] Clinton Bailey, 1974, "Bedouin Star-Lore in Sinai and the Negev," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 37, 580-596, at 590. Cited by Varisco, "The Pleiades in Arab Folklore."

[109] Karl B. Klunzinger, 1878, *Upper Egypt: Its People and its Products,* Blackie & Son, London, p.301. Cited by Varisco, "The Pleiades in Arab Folklore."

[110] Varisco, "The Pleiades in Arab Folklore."

[111] John Lewis Burckhardt, 1829/31, *Travels in Arabia*, vol. 2, Colburn, London, p.31. Cited by Varisco, "The Pleiades in Arab Folklore."

[112] Harold R.P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert: A Glimpse into Badawin Life in Kuwait and Sa'udi Arabia*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1951, p.24. Cited by Varisco, "The Pleiades in Arab Folklore."
[113] In a well-known tradition, the description of this connection is ascribed to Muḥammad himself. Varisco, "The Pleiades in Arab Folklore."
[114] Varisco, "The Pleiades in Arab Folklore."
[115] Cited by Varisco, "The Pleiades in Arab Folklore."
[116] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, p.167-180.
[117] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, p.160-162.
[118] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, p.177.
[119] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, p.147-181.
[120] Qurʾān 6:73, 9:94, 9:105, 13:9; the Name commences with an *ʿayn.* William F. McCants, 2007, "A Grammar of the Divine: Translation, Notes, and Semi-Critical Edition of the Bāb's *Risāla fī al-Naḥw wa al-Ṣarf*," *Syzygy: A Journal of Bābī-Bahāʾī Studies* 1 (1), article 2, gloss 60; online at http://bahai-library.com/mccants_grammar_divine.
[121] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, p.174 & 176.
[122] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, p. 176.
[123] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, p. 174.
[124] Francis, *Islamic Symbols and Sufi Rituals*, p. 179.
[125] Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, 240.
[126] Graham, "Qurʾānic Spell-ing."
[127] al-Būnī, *Manbaʿ*, p.254; Graham, "Qurʾānic Spell-ing."
[128] MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Bahaʾism*, p.146.
[129] MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Bahaʾism*, p.50 & 146.
[130] MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Bahaʾism*, p.50.
[131] Once again, the second symbol is actually a *lām-ʾalif* ligature; see note 56.
[132] Also known as *lunette sigla* or *brillenbuchstaben*. See Savage-Smith, 2004, "Introduction: Magic and Divination in Early Islam," In: Magic and Divination in Early Islam, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, Ashgate Variorum, Aldershot, xiii-xlxi, at xxiv; Canaan "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," 167-169; Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.196-218; Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions*, p.228-230; *CHARAKTÊR - An International Seminary on Magical Signs in Antiquity*, 24th September 2010, ELTE University, Budapest; online at http://ookor.blogspot.com/2010/09/charakter-international-seminary-on.html.
[133] Alternatively, one can view the four component elements of the two final symbols in Fig. 5a(ii) & (iii) as degenerate forms of the four strokes in the canonical fifth Seal ( |||| ), with the orthogonal nature of both symbols recalling the over-bar on this Seal in the series from the *Dīwān*.
[134] MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Bahaʾism*, p.145-146.
[135] Online at http://lbi-project.org/alph_mor.php.
[136] Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," 148 & 157-159.
[137] Shadrach, *Healing Love Prosperity*, p.43-46.
[138] E.g., a talisman to protect a woman against miscarriage, online at http://www.alrawhany.com/vb/showthread.php?p=10602&highlight=%CD%CC%C7%C8.
[139] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.110.
[140] *Ibid.*
[141] E.g., *Manbaʿ*, p.92 & 171; Doutté, *Magie et Religion*, p.167.
[142] Doutté, *Magie et Religion*, p.183-188.
[143] Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," p.161.
[144] E.g., Alex Patterson, 1992, *A Field Guide to Rock Art Symbols of the Greater Southwest*, Big Earth Publishing, Boulder CO, p.191.
[145] Munya Andrews, 2005, *The Seven Sisters of the Pleiades: Stories from Around the World*, Spinifex Press, Melbourne, p.28.
[146] Andrews, *The Seven Sisters of the Pleiades*, p.28 & 34.
[147] Andrews, *The Seven Sisters of the Pleiades*, p.36.

[148] Online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleiades_in_folklore_and_literature.
[149] Andrews, *The Seven Sisters of the Pleiades*, p.28.
[150] Online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pleiades_in_folklore_and_literature.
[151] Gerardus D. Bouw, 1999, "The Bible and the Pleiades," *Biblical Astronomer* 9 (87), 4-17.
[152] Andrews, *The Seven Sisters of the Pleiades*, p.28.
[153] Richard H. Allen, 1963, *Star Names: Their Lore and Meaning*, Courier Dover Publications, New York, p.399. This is an unabridged and corrected republication of the original 1899 CE edition *Star-Names and their Meanings*, published by G.E. Stechert.
[154] Aben Ragel (who is described subsequently in the main text) was a Muslim who wrote in Arabic. However, his works were translated into Hebrew or Spanish by Jewish writers who often published under their own names. For example, Aben Ragel's most famous book on astrology, *al-Bāriʿ fī Aḥkām al-Nujūm*, was translated into Castilian by Yehuda ben Moshe (Judah ben Moses). This probably explains the misidentification of Aben Ragel's religious affiliation by Allen. See H. Suter, 1900, "Die Mathematiker und Astronomen der Araber und ihre Werke," *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Mathematischen Wissenschaften* 10, at 100; H. Suter, 1902, "Nachträge und Berichtigungen zu 'Die Mathematiker und Astronomen der Araber und ihre Werke,'" 155-185, at 172; and E.J. Brill, 1916, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 2, 356; all cited by Prof. Hamed A. Ead, History of Islamic Science #6, online at http://www.levity.com/alchemy/islam17.html. See also James H. Holden, 2006, *A History of Horoscopic Astrology*, American Federation of Astrologers, Tempe, Arizona, p.130; Marcus Jastrow, Ludwig Blau, and Kaufmann Kohler, "Astrology," *Jewish Encyclopedia*, online at http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=2051&letter=A.
[155] Allen, *Star Names*, p.399. The outdated punctuation of the 1899 CE original has been amended.
[156] Adam Clarke, 1828, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 2, Bangs & Emory, New York, p.752.
[157] See references in note 154 above.
[158] William Smith, 1863, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, John Murray/Walton & Maberly, London, p.891.
[159] Brannon M. Wheeler, ed., 2002, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis*, Continuum International, London, p.56.
[160] Ed de Moor Rodopi, 2001, *Representations of the Divine in Arabic Poetry*, p.28-29.
[161] E.g., Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.93 & 127; Anawati, "Le Nom Supreme de Dieu," 25; Canaan, "The Decipherment of Arabic Talismans," 169-171; Harrison and Shadrach, *Magic That Works*, p.65-66.
[162] "Les Sept Archons" (19 Aug 2011), online at http://the-visionnaire.over-blog.com/categorie-11568910.html. By way of shared assignations to the same day of the week, *Yaṭat* is paired with Benetnash (Alkaid), *Ṭat* with Dubhe, *Saṭiṭ* with Merak, *Saṭityah* with Phecda, and so on. These and other correspondences cited on the webpage are attributed to a certain *Traité des Sept Émanations Planétaires* (Aztarax Liber 1851), chapter 8 (p.891), which I have been unable to identify further.
[163] Graham, "Qurʾānic Spell-ing."
[164] E.g., Hans Wehr, 1994, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 4th edn., ed. J.M. Cowan, Spoken Language Services, Urbana IL, p.677; J.G. Hava, 2003, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, Goodword Books, New Delhi, p.444.
[165] E.g., Hava, Arabic-English Dictionary; Wehr, Arabic-English Dictionary; Francis J. Steingass, 1993, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, Asian Educational Services; and enquiry of Arabic speakers, including a qualified philologist. The only partial match is to طتو (*ṭatū*, *ṭatw*) meaning "go, depart" (Steingass, p.627).
[166] Zacuto, *Shorshei haShemot*, p.335 (*yod* sign 142 & 143).
[167] Zacuto, *Shorshei haShemot*, p.134.
[168] Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere*, p.115.
[169] A copy in the original Arabic is online at http://www.scribd.com/doc/31498720/Asaph-Ben-Berechiah-Al-Ajnas, and it is available in translation as pseudo-Asaph Ben Berechiah, 2009, *Grand Key of Solomon the King*, Ishtar, Vancouver. *Ṭat* occurs on p. 87 & 92 of the translation.
[170] This modifier potentially contributes the first syllable of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton (*Yahweh*) and mimics the Arabic vocative case (*yā*).
[171] The deep roots of *Ṭat* and the other Seal names will be explored in a forthcoming paper. Post-printing addendum: It is also worth noting the similarity between *ṬĪRŪṬAT* and *Ṭatiyah*, both from medieval

Arabic magic texts, and the Divine Name *ṬĪRQṬATĪAH*, one of the *nomina barbara* in the *Sword of Moses*, a Jewish book of magic thought to date from the 6th-8th centuries CE. The spelling and meaning of *ṬĪRŪṬAT* in the Arabic context (as discussed in the main text) may have been a later development. See Yuval Harari, 2012, "The Sword of Moses (*Ḥarba de-Moshe*): A New Translation and Introduction," *Magic, Ritual & Witchcraft* 7, 58-98, at 77 (given unvowelled as *ṬĪRQṬTYH*).

[172] Bruce J. Malina, 1995, *On the Genre and Message of Revelation: Star Visions and Sky Journeys*, Hendrickson, Peabody MA, p.70.

[173] Graham, "The Seven Seals of Revelation and the Seven Classical Planets" (details in note 67).

***Errata*** *(fixed in this version)*

* Loss of diacritics and occasional problems with Arabic characters during typesetting have been rectified throughout.
* MacEoin references: p.149 & 150 have been corrected to 145 & 146, respectively.
* Fig. 2, penultimate line in image: citation of Fig. 1c(iii) has been corrected to Fig. 1c(ii).
* On page [e9], "upper left-hand magic square" has been corrected to "upper right-hand magic square."
* A line that was deleted post-proof has been restored to the *sharaf al-shams* paragraph [e10, top], and the definition of this Arabic term has been modified slightly to better reflect its scope.
* On page [e13], "Fig. 5a(i)" has been corrected to read "Fig.1d."

***Addenda*** *(present in this version)*

* Note 68 has been updated to reflect an additional Hebrew source relevant to the survey.
* Notes 81 and 171 have been updated to cite relevant papers that were in press at the same time as this article.